SIGNIFICANCE OF SOLITUDE IN SPIRITUAL LIFE *

Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – May 1963; Vol. 50; page 2

The term solitude instantaneously brings to one's mind the majestic Himalayas, with its snow-capped peaks, its aromatic herbs and shady trees, its magnificent fauna and flora, its birds of beautiful plumage, flitting occasionally through the forest lisping sweet notes, its swift flowing currents and cool waters. The Himalayas has attracted and been attracting world-weary souls for ages now. It has sheltered in its bosom hermitages of Rishis; and has preserved its holy atmosphere vibrant with the notes of the Vedic hymns and Vedantic lore, in all its purity of accent as were uttered by the teachers of yore. Away from the bustle of cities it had maintained all through the ages the dignity which strikes awe in man and has compelled recognition from poets. Kalidasa, the famous Indian poet, goes into raptures while he speaks about the Himalayas. He says: 'There in the northern direction lies the godly king of mountains, called the Himalayas, entering the seas on the east and the west (with its rivers); and stands lofty and high, as if it were the earth's measuring rod'. He runs on in this strain for another twelve verses, in his memorable work *Kumarasambhava*. Rarely were the sacred precincts of the Himalayas disturbed in the past by the changes in the political atmosphere or by social upheavals. It was the haven of rest and abode of peace for the restless and the enquiring. In the then national set-up when the aged ones withdrew from the responsibilities of the world, after fully meeting the demands made on them by the world, it was the Himalayas which charmed them by its quietude, vastness and solitude, its picturesqueness and calmness. What does this signify? It signifies two things: that outer calmness and solitude are the essential factors which contribute to inner calmness; and secondly that it is in the lap of nature that man learns to be natural, to shed his artificiality.

Solitude, a prime necessity

It is possible that the moderns, attuned as they are to the hectic life of the present civilization, and feel one with the ideas expressed in Cowper's poem:

> 'O Solitude where are the charms
> That sages have seen in thy face?
> Better to live in the midst of alarms
> Than dwell in this horrible place.'
> *Alexander Selkirk*, Stanza 1.

may interpret this retirement of the aged to the forest, in the past, as an admission of failure to face the problems of life, or take it as an indication of setting in of senility at a certain age. This argument seems to make a travesty of facts. For it is a matter of conjecture alone as to how many senile people can leave their homes, at the fag end of their life's journey willingly,

to take to a harder and uncertain life. Moreover, it is security and not insecurity that men seek even in the bloom of youth, at the height of their vigour and strength — even if we take the present trends as the standard. What to speak then of the infirm old age? This postulation therefore falls to the ground being baseless. On the other hand it stands to reason to presume that there was a genuine desire in those who relinquished the responsibilities of the world, when at the height of their fame, to know the Reality. It was almost an impossibility for them, moulded as their lives were in the hoary tradition, to forget or lose sight of the aim of life. The goal of life kept constantly renewing and reviewing before their minds' vision so that when they had reached the point of satiation in their desires, rather attained dispassion towards them having been discriminately engaged in fulfilling them, they no more sought to be entangled into the maze. Solitude was what they longed for: to think of the Creator, Who sent them into this world, from Whom they were separated and unto Whom they yearned to be united again.

Religion apart, solitude is a felt need in all thoughtful avocations. It may be the mathematician working at his table, the scientist busy in the laboratory or the student at his studies, in every case solitude is a thing that can never be dispensed with. Observe how prudently, the diligent students shut themselves up to pore over their studies! How deliberately the scientists go into seclusion to think and work out their hypotheses! When we see that even in secular life isolation is at times necessary, we must pause to ask: how much more conscientiously should not religious aspirants seek loneliness?

Solitude of the mind

Solitude again can be classified into three types: solitude of the forest or mountain caves, solitude of the mind and solitude of the Atman (Self or Soul). Although outer calmness aids man to attain inner peace, the outer aids alone without the active cooperation of the mind are of little avail in spiritual life. The mind must first be educated to dissociate itself from its desires and then cultivated to think of the Supreme. It is said that man may obtain the grace of the preceptor, the grace of the Lord and also be blessed with holy company but if he has not the grace of his own mind all this will not help him in any way spiritually. Bhartrhari in his *Vairagyasataka* most tellingly describes how tenaciously the mind clings to desires: 'My food is what is collected by begging that too insipid and taken only once, bed the bare earth, body the only servant, clothes the old tattered rags, yet, alas, the desires for enjoyment won't leave me.'[2] So strong are the desires of an uncultivated mind left to associate freely with the objects of the senses.

It is a long way to attain solitude or one-pointedness of the mind but on that account none need be dispirited, none need lose heart. As we have instances of despondency, we also have models of grit and grim determination. It is said of Vacaspati Misra, the writer of the well-known commentary *Bhamati* (on the Brahma Sutras), that at a very early age he took to the writing of this commentary. After he had begun his work he was married to a young and beautiful girl. But he was so absorbed in his work that he did not know when the day dawned or the night came. He did not know who looked after his bodily needs. When tired he would lay down his body to rest on the mat near his writing desk and when he got up he commenced his work. His wife, however, dutifully and without a murmur looked after his needs. This went on for years and years until he had finished his work. Then when he lifted his head to look at the world he saw beside him a grey-haired woman. He asked her who she was and when he came to know that she was his wife and that she it was who had served him

faithfully all through, he out of gratitude made her immortal by naming his *magnum opus* after her. This is an instance of one-pointedness of the mind. From this we learn that all that is wanted is aptitude and resolution. The same concentrated mind if given to God can contact Him too. That is how the saints and sages attained realization.

Sri Ramakrishna is very emphatic about having recourse to solitude for the purpose of practising spiritual disciplines. He says that we should practise disciplines in the forest, in a secluded corner of the house or in the mind. Again he remarks 'If you ask me how long you should live in solitude away from your family, I should say that it would be good for you if you could spend even one day in such a manner. Three days at a time are still better. One may live in solitude for twelve days, a month, three months, or a year, according to one's convenience and ability.' This advice he gives to householders who cannot devote all their time to God. What then to speak of aspirants who have forsaken their all for the sake of God? And what type of solitude does he prescribe. He exhorts: 'When you practise discipline in solitude, keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother, father; sister, brother, friends, or relatives near you. While thus practising discipline in solitude, you should think "I have no one else in the world. God is my all".' Continuing Sri Ramakrishna remarks, 'The mind is like milk. If you keep the mind in the world, which is like water, then the milk and water will get mixed. That is why people keep milk in a quiet place and let it set into curd, and then churn butter from it. Likewise, through spiritual discipline practised in solitude, churn the butter of knowledge and devotion from the milk of the mind. Then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will not get mixed with the world. The mind will float detached on the water of the world.'

To control and train the turbulent mind we have not only to withdraw it from the senses and sense-objects but also direct it towards God. For, the mind requires some support to cling on to. You cannot make a vacuum of the mind all at once. The moment you try to do it all types of thoughts will enter it. The one thing the mind foolishly believes is, that it will be able to hold on to the gross objects. It envelops that object with its veil of attachment. But soon it gets disillusioned, the attachment snaps due to the loss of or estrangement from the object of attachment. Then it is that frustration sets in. Again and again the mind tries to settle itself on gross sense-objects and sensations, and repeatedly it is disillusioned. With each blow thus received man withdraws into himself little by little until at last he leaves off hankering after worldly things and completely turns inward for solace. With some this process takes a long time, with some others a few disillusionments are sufficient to awaken them to reality.

Taste for solitude

A taste for solitude is generated when the clamourings of the senses are silenced and the senses themselves are rudely shocked out of their gear by the internal blows the mind receives or the external sufferings the body endures. When this taste develops and is directed to God a great part of the battle of life is won. But mind being what it is requires constant watching. Discrimination is the only watchdog man has to prevent his sheep of thoughts from straying on to forbidden ground. With discrimination alert and taste for solitude active we can brace ourselves for the life's fray. If ever anyone by the grace of the Lord is able to quieten his mind and develop taste for solitude it will be the height of folly on his part if he does not utilize the occasion to naturalize this taste, make it his own. This solitude is man's highest treasure. It will not be preposterous if we say that it is in a way the bestower of health

as well. For does not man everyday of his life long for rest and sleep? What is deep sleep? What keeps him company there? Alone, alone he is in that state. Yet he is not afraid to go into it. This sleep is the redeeming factor. It soothes many a shock, embalms many a wound and helps the body to recover its strength. It is the solitude of the deep sleep that restores much of the energy that man wastes while in his waking and dream states.

The question is how to cultivate the taste for solitude. No hard and fast rule can be laid down about it. Broadly speaking it can be obtained by practice and dispassion. Dispassion can be arrived at by discrimination. What is this discrimination? Between what are we to discriminate? 'Two types of objects, the good and the pleasant, come to man. The wise one weighing the pros and cons of both, chooses the good alone as it outweighs the pleasant, but the shortsighted one thinks only about the life on this earth and accepts the pleasant,'[3] says the *Kathopanisad*. The discrimination is to be between the good, which leads one to liberation and pleasant, which makes for bondage. How to know the one from the other? There are two ways: one is to listen to the words of the scriptures and the wise, other to learn by experience. How to distinguish between the two experiences is told us by the Bhagavad Gita: 'The joy which in the beginning appears like poison but in the end tastes like nectar is *sattvika*, for it is the outcome of the pure mind's intense contemplation on the Atman. The joy one experiences due to the contact of the senses with the sense-objects which appears as nectar in the beginning but turns out to be like poison in the end is termed *rajasika*. There is again a third type of pleasure called *tamasika* which in the beginning as well as in the end deludes man by inducing sleep, lethargy, and negligence.'[4] Herein we get clear indications as what to expect when we follow a certain path. Whatever joy one gets from the contact with the outside world, is of a transient nature and produces an unfavourable reaction. It saps our energy. In other words whatever ennobles one's character, expands one's heart, augments one's forbearance, increases one's love to fellow beings, that is the path of dispassion and the opposite is the way to bondage.

Solitude a great cure for artificiality

Many opinions have been expressed for and against solitude. We need not discuss here their merits or demerits. Sufficient it is to say that, according to one's experience whether sweet or bitter one expresses one's opinion. Again there is good and bad in every thing. A man may read the *Bhagavata* by the light of a lamp and another may forge a document by the same light. Can we then blame the light for the latter's abominable act? Similarly if some few tend to become beastly in their behaviour after retiring into solitude, the blame need not be placed at solitude's door. There is, however, one good thing in solitude which all must concede, viz. one cannot deceive anyone else except oneself in solitude, but in society you cannot be so sure. Observe the world and we can see how artificial it has become. Convinced though we be of a wrong being done, or a wicked act being perpetrated, we either wink at it or try to justify it. Again society frames some norms, some rules, and every one pretends to follow them. Let them get the least chance of evading these rules and it is doubtful whether ten to one could withstand the temptations of utilizing the opportunity to aggrandize, to enrich, or to earn name for themselves at others' cost. Man's character gets exposed at that time. In the solitude of his mind, he may harbour much ill-will towards a person but in society he shows much affection towards him. The better a person can hide his ill-feelings and odious thoughts and look polished and good, the more he is thought of in this world. It is therefore said 'judge a man not by the great works he does but

by his little acts. The former he does for praise, the latter unwittingly reveal his character'. Let a person go into solitude for a few moments daily and analyse his own acts and we believe that it is possible that he may turn a new leaf in his life. The main point is, the feverish activity which engages man of the modern times all his day and all his life leaves him no respite for introspection. He is more a machine, more like an automaton than a thinking individual. In this age of specialization man's thinking also is done by some one else for him. He only follows the dotted line. And when this happens it is easy to be led astray than when one thinks for himself. Many of man's artificialities would disappear if only he is a little introspective.

Solitude of the Atman

Now we come to the solitude of the Atman, which is the natural culmination of the other two. For no calmness, no peace that depends on created things, can be eternal in duration. Man seeks spirituality for attaining permanent release from the three sorts of miseries, viz. *adhyatmika* (misery due to bodily and mental ailments), *adhibhautika* (caused by elements or created beings), *adhidaivika* (caused by supernatural agencies). Each of these miseries, however, can be mitigated or got rid of for the time being by other agencies also; for instance, misery due to bodily ailments can be cured temporarily by medicine; mental worries due to any wants may be overcome by fulfilling that want. Likewise other miseries too can be overcome for a time by other helps. All these, however, keep on repeating and hence there is that great desire to be entirely free from them. We have to take recourse to the spirit, the Atman the uncreated Being to go beyond misery. When we realize the solitude of the Atman, and find bliss in the Atman alone we are free. When no other object remains to attract us, 'when we find that the Atman alone has become all this, where is infatuation and where is misery for him who sees oneness everywhere,'[5] says the *Isavasyopanisad*.

In spite of all this when man is alone he gets frightened. What is the cause of fear? The reason is not far to seek. Man's congenital tendencies are too strong. He has long been accustomed to live in groups, in constant turmoil. He is addicted to the charms of society so much that he finds it difficult to live alone. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Can a man who has been used to the turmoil and the rush of life live at ease if he comes to a quiet place? He suffers and perchance he may lose his mind.' So mere intellectual grasp of the Upanisadic truths is of no avail. A constant rumination over them besides the actual practice of solitude is essential to become fearless. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* gives a description of how Prajapati also, at the beginning of creation was deluded and afraid. It says: 'In the beginning this (universe) was only the self (Viraj), of human form. He reflected and found nothing else but himself. . . . At this he was afraid. Therefore even now a solitary one is afraid. He then reflected, "as there is none else than myself what am I afraid of." On reflecting thus fear left him, for what was there to fear? It is from a second entity alone that fear comes.'[6] Sankara in his commentary on these verses says: 'Because this Purusa was endowed with a body and limbs, he was afraid of his extinction, owing to a false notion. And as in our case the way he adopted to get rid of this false notion, which was the cause of fear, was by acquiring the right knowledge of the Atman.' Sankara here stated that we too are deluded by the false notion of our extinction with the death of the body and the only way to get over this fear is to know our Atman in its true perspective. How to have the right knowledge? By reflection in solitude on the teachings of the Srutis. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* says elsewhere, 'Wherever duality is seen there only one sees another, one hears another. But when this duality vanishes then

who will see whom, who will hear whom.'[7] All our troubles and miseries start with seeing duality and all disappear with the realization of Oneness, which is in the Atman.

---

[1] Kumarasambhavam.
[2] Vairagya Sataka, 15.
[3] Katha,2.2.
[4] Bhagavad Gita, Chap. 18, 37 to 39.
[5] Isavasyopanisad. 7.
[6] Br.Up.., I,iv,1&2.
[7] Br. Up. ,II.iv.14.

SELF-EFFORT AND SELF-SURRENDER*

Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – June 1963; Vol. 50; page 42

Self-effort and self-surrender, are two meaningful words which are often loosely employed; and are more often than not mistaken as contradictory to one another. Self-effort is usually associated and aligned with the follower of the path of jnana and self-surrender with that of the follower of bhakti. Under such circumstances it will look paradoxical to say that both these attitudes can, nay should be found in a spiritual aspirant. To say that one supplements the other, one completes the other, or one is the corollary of the other will appear as absurd. But many things that look incongruous at first sight, on a superficial valuation or a cursory examination reveal quite contrary natures on more sustained and penetrating investigation. It is so in the physical world as well as in the metaphysical.

It is necessary for us here to know how this popular error, that these two attitudes of self-effort and self-surrender are for two distinctive types of aspirants, crept into the human mind. On first examination there seem to be sufficient grounds for this view. We all know that the path of jnana yoga is a severe one. The aspirant has to begin with the negation of the phenomena. He has to fight every moment with his mind and restrain it from identifying or associating itself not only with possessions and relations but with his body, mind and ego too. This is a tremendous task. Herculean efforts are needed to counteract the propensities that the mind has gathered for ages. And as Swami Vivekananda puts it, 'It is swimming against the current,' the hardest job. Sri Krishna too concurs on this point when he says, 'The difficulties encountered by those who are attached to the path of the Unmanifest are greater.'[1] Mark the word *greater* here. It is only a relative term, a comparison with the other path, that of bhakti. Due to the enormous effort that was required to be employed in order to follow this path, self-effort naturally came to mean the path of jnana. Thus far none will contradict this contention. In the path of devotion, on the other hand, the devotee is required to surrender everything, his body, mind and soul to God. Consequently the laity took it as the path of self-surrender. Neither can it be said that it is a misnomer if the two attitudes are not considered exclusive. All the miscomprehension starts when each is precluded and segregated from the other.

We shall now consider, the how and why of the above statement. We have seen that the path of knowledge requires inordinate efforts and it appears that there is no ghost of a chance for surrender there. But let us examine the implications of these efforts. A follower of jnana denies that he is the body or mind. That is his discipline. What then does he postulate? What does he consider himself to be? He says he is the Self, the Atman, which is of the nature of eternal purity, knowledge and freedom. But there is a thing called ego which stands as a barrier from an aspirant's realizing this nature. Though one may have overcome the idea for the time being that he is the body he usually identifies himself with this ego, the lower self. But the ego is not the real Self. This ego is to be merged in the Higher Self, the True

Self, the Cosmic consciousness; in other words the self-effort which the aspirant was considering as his should enable him to surrender his small self to the universal Self, Brahman, then alone will his efforts have a meaning. Then alone he would have gained his end. If however, he denies outwardly his body but holds on to his ego, the ego may swallow him up, bind him to the world as do the body and mind in the case of the ordinary man. Let us be more explicit: The proper and true knowledge is 'Atman is not the doer; not the enjoyer, not touched by whatever happens to the body.' Now as long as any idea of doing or enjoying remains in the aspirant, he cannot be called a follower of the complete and true *jnana marga*. When nothing is his how can the efforts alone be his? If he is not the body how can the efforts of the body be his? If he is not the mind, how can the efforts of the mind be his? But this does not mean that he should give up efforts but should give up the idea that he is the doer. When it comes to this we pause to ask: What then does it amount to if not surrender, surrender to the True Self, the Universal Self? We have thus seen that actually self-effort and self-surrender go together in the case of the path of jnana.

The other path which we take as that of self-surrender requires perhaps a little less of effort but as much of perseverance and tenacity as the first. But, because the efforts are a little less it cannot be taken to mean that there is no place for self-effort at all. It will be puerile to understand it this way. Even in the physical world, we observe, every living being struggling and making effort for its very life, for its very preservation; and wherever efforts in this direction dwindled in that proportion these beings disappeared from the face of the earth. There is a saying in Sanskrit which impresses this idea vividly: 'Beasts of prey do not enter the mouth of a sleeping lion,' that is to say that even the lion which is considered as the king among the beasts has also to prowl and hunt if it has to live. Without effort nothing can live. We shall cite another saying in Sanskrit which brings out this meaning: 'To a person who is lion-like in self-exertion, Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth reaches. But idlers allude to it as "destiny, surely destiny". Denying destiny do manly endeavour, and if you fail then where is blame for you?' One should apply this advice in spiritual life too. People there may be who think that self-effort on the mundane plane is not only good but incumbent but in the psychological plane self-surrender is the best. It is as good as saying, 'I shall enjoy life and God will look after my soul, if there is one.' This is the hedonist's view and not self-surrender. This is the greatest pitfall, nay this view is the graveyard of spirituality. It is hypocrisy or at the most deceiving oneself. This way none was saved. It does not settle the issue of life, nor of death. It is neither here nor there.

There is a beautiful parable of Sri Ramakrishna which brings out this kind of hypocrisy in its true colours: 'A Brahmana, succeeded in rearing up a beautiful garden with much effort and great pains. One day a cow entered the garden and began to graze and destroy the plants. The Brahmana was infuriated. He so violently assaulted the cow that it died. He was seized with fear. He thought, "Alas, I, a Brahmana, have killed a cow —which is the greatest of sins." The Brahmana had read a little of the Vedas and remembered that human sense organs derive their power of functioning from the gods and as Indra was the presiding deity of the hand he pacified himself by thinking: "It is Indra who has moved my hand and killed the cow."

'Now the sin due to the killing of the cow came to enter the body of the Brahmana. He said, "Go away, you have no place here; Indra has killed her, go to him." So the sin went to seize Indra. Indra said to the sin, "Wait a little please, let me go, speak a word or two with the Brahmana and come back. Seize me then if you like." Saying so, Indra assumed a human form, entered into the Brahmana's garden and saw him standing close by looking after the

plants and trees. Indra began to praise the beauty of the garden in the Brahmana's hearing: 'Oh, what a beautiful garden it is! With what good taste have the plants and trees been planted, each in its proper place.' He approached the Brahmana and said, "Sir, can you tell me whose garden it is? It is so beautiful." On hearing the praise of the garden, the Brahmana was besides himself with joy and said, "Sir, this is my garden; it is I who have planted all these. Come let me show you round." While he was thus taking Indra round and praising himself all the time, he came inadvertantly to the place where the dead cow was lying. Startled, as it were, Indra asked, "Whew! Who has killed the cow here?" The Brahmana, who was all the while taking the credit of planting the garden, was at a loss what to say and remained utterly silent. Indra then assumed his own form and said, "Ah! you hypocrite, you have done whatever is good in the garden and it is the killing of the cow alone that devolves on me. Isn't it? Here is your sin of cow-killing. Take it." Saying so, Indra disappeared and the sin came and took possession of the Brahmana's body.' Such is the surrender that some practise. It is therefore better that as long as one tends the body, one attends to the soul also and that more solicitously than one does the body.

Again surrender is not running away from duty. Sri Krishna in the Gita chastises Arjuna for posing as a wise man and trying to escape from his duty to fight the battle. He enumerates several reasons why Arjuna should fight. First of all he says: 'You talk like a wise man but grieve over those who should not be grieved. For, a wise person grieves not for the dead nor the living.'[2] Secondly, 'For a Kshatriya there is no greater good fortune than fight a righteous battle.'[3] Even while one worked one should remember God, for having continuously and constantly kept Him in one's mind, the thought of Him will persist even at the last moments of one's life, which will enable one to reach God. This is the reason why Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna, 'Remember Me and fight.'[4] Lastly he says, 'Even the maintenance of your body will become difficult if you become inactive.'[5] Doing duty has its own merit. Swami Vivekananda says: 'You should cultivate a noble nature by doing your duty. By doing our duty we get rid of the idea of duty; and then and then only we feel everything as done by God. We are but machines in His hand. This body is opaque, God is the lamp. Whatever is going out of the body is God's. You don't feel it. You feel "I". This is delusion. You must learn calm submission to the will of God. Duty is the best school for it. This duty is morality. Drill yourself to be thoroughly submissive.'

What then is the real meaning of self-surrender? Who can really surrender? These are the burning questions one should seek answers for, before talking of surrender. Self to a devotee means the *jiva* who resides in the body. There is the Lord, Iswara who presides over all the *jivas*. The surrender of this *jiva*, i.e. body, mind and soul, to Iswara is real self-surrender. It is the calm submission to the will of God, without fretting or fuming. It is the implicit belief in the goodness of God and one's capacity to view everything that happens to oneself, whether good or evil, as a blessing from God. Once a great saint, Pavahari Baba, was bitten by a snake. The saint fell unconscious. After he revived and regained his consciousness some one asked him how it was that he who did no harm to any creature was bitten. His reply was: 'It was a messenger from the beloved, the Lord.' That is how a devotee views even a catastrophe. There is no room for egoism in self-surrender; one has nothing to call one's own having submitted everything to the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna gives the analogy of a kitten, depending on its mother, to illustrate self-surrender. The mother cat carries the kitten in its mouth, securely holding it, and sometimes puts it on the master's bed, sometimes on the roof behind a pile of wood. But whatever it does, it does for the good of the kitten. That type of dependence is complete

surrender, complete reliance, on God. The aspirant yearns for God and God alone. He does not want anything but God. He does not calculate how much material gain he can reap by his surrender. There is no trading in his surrender. Our Epics like the Mahabharata are replete with stories which delineate such self-surrender. Prahlada and Ambarisha are some of the shining examples they have held before us.

In recent times Sri Durga Charan Nag and Girish Chandra Ghosh, the two householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna stand out, prominently as illustrations of this attitude of surrender. Nag Mahashaya was superb. There was no peer to him in humility, and his love of God was unique. But the miracle of the Master was Girish Chandra Ghosh. Girish at the time he met Sri Ramakrishna was leading the life of a Bohemian. But by his simple and unbounded faith and absolute surrender he was turned from a sinner into a Saint. How was this alchemy performed? When after meeting Sri Ramakrishna Girish evinced interest in spiritual life and asked the Master how he should conduct thenceforward, Sri Ramakrishna, a teacher *par excellence* as he was, far from making any violent attempt at reform asked him to live as he was living but take the Lord's name morning and evening. But even this simple discipline Girish could not promise to carry out. Sri Ramakrishna then asked him to take the name of the Lord at least while taking his food. This too Girish could not bring himself to assure because he did not himself know in what state he would be at that time. At last the Master asked Girish to give him the 'power of attorney' and said he would do whatever was necessary for his salvation. Girish jumped at the suggestion and gladly accepted it, thinking that he wouldn't have to do anything. But one day when he was talking in the presence of the Master he said 'I would do it'. The Master immediately corrected him. He said 'How can you say that? Have you not surrendered yourself to the Lord? Then say that if the Lord wills I shall do it.' From that day onwards Girish had to remember Sri Ramakrishna before he could do anything or say anything. Girish later on said 'How could I know that giving the "power of attorney" was such a difficult task? Much remains to be understood even now. I find that at some time there is an end to the spiritual practices like japa, austerities and devotional exercises but there is no end to the work of a person who has given the "power of attorney"; for, he has to watch his every step and every breath to know whether he does so depending on Him and His power or on this wicked "I".' So difficult is absolute self-surrender.

Swami Vivekananda remarks, 'If every body can truly live always in this mood, then he is a free Soul. But what really happens is that for the 'good' I have the credit, but for the 'bad' Thou, God, are responsible. Without the attainment of the fullness of Knowledge or Divine Love, such a state of absolute reliance on the Lord does not come.' It is therefore, better to be realistic, measure our shortcomings and exert truthfully and perseveringly to eliminate them; better to be honest than to be simulating reliance on God. Sri Krishna, though in a slightly different context, points out: 'He only has no work whose enjoyment is in the Atman alone whose satisfaction is in the Atman, whose bliss is in the Atman alone.'[6] Only such a person soaked in the thought of God, permeated through and through by His presence, 'who sees God inside and outside need not do any tapas.' Until one attains that stage one should earnestly endeavour, has to put in all efforts.

It is obvious from the above that absolute self-surrender is possible for the highest type of devotee, of which there are very few at any one time. We have to know then as to what is the path for the generality of aspirants. Sri Krishna in the chapter on bhakti yoga in the Gita gives a list of paths one could follow according to one's capacity. He asks Arjuna, 'Fix your mind on Me, rest your intellect in Me, when you will, without doubt, be able to live in Me. If however, you find it difficult try the Yoga of practice; if that is impossible, work for

Me. Even by doing work for Me you will attain the goal. If you are unable to do that also, taking refuge in Me and being self-controlled, renounce the fruits of all actions.'[7] It is necessary to awaken love of God within our hearts by any one or all of these methods. And once divine love dawns there is no danger for the aspirant. Till then it is a hard uphill task and we have to face it. There is no easy way in religion. It is idle fancy to imagine that God's mercy will suddenly descend upon us. If it comes, well and good, but let us purify ourselves to receive it, and do our part of the work. We are well aware of the saying 'God helps those who help themselves,' and we do remember it in our earthly pursuits. Let us apply it in our spiritual pursuit as well. There should be no stint or hesitation on our part to exert, at the same time there should be no eagerness for result. For, God, the all-merciful Lord, under Whom we seek shelter is the Dispenser of all fruits. He will do what is good for us, and when we love God, exertion will not be exertion, it won't be tiresome. If we do all work as a dedication to God, there would be joy in it.

Lastly we come to the question, what exertion or effort is a devotee required to put in. The *Bhagavata*, the bhakti sutras and saints have dealt with this subject at great length and may be separately discussed. Yet it will not be out of place, if we mention here one significant verse of the poet-saint, Kulasekhara Alwar, which exquisitely portrays how every limb of our body can be utilized for, and every function of the body be sublimated by worship and adoration of the Lord. Though much of the charm and beauty of the verse will be lost in translation we give it for the sake of those who cannot follow Sanskrit. Addressing the different limbs the saint says: 'Sing, O tongue Keshava's glory; think O mind of Muraripu; O hands worship Sridhara; hear O ears the stories of Achyuta; O you eyes see Krishna; bend your steps O feet towards Hari's abode; smell, O nose the tulasi-leaf offered at the feet of Mukunda; bow down O head to Adhokshaja."[8] Every name of the Lord used here is pregnant with meaning, thinking about which man becomes imbued with devotion. Hence, resting our will in the Lord and remembering Him always we should do *sadhana*.

---

[1] Bhagavad Gita, 12.5.
[2] Bhagavad Gita, 2.11.
[3] Ibid., 2.31.
[4] Ibid., 8.7.
[5] Ibid., 3.8.
[6] Ibid., 3.17.
[7] Bhagavad Gita, 12, 8-11.
[8] Mukundamala, 10.

Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – July 1963; Vol. 50; page 82

Life as Architecture

'Man is the architect of his own fate', said Swami Vivekananda. Life is really an architecture. It substantially answers to Ruskin's description: 'Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power and pleasure.'[1] But here the edifice is the character of man. It not only gives pleasure to the builder but even those who occasionally come in contact with him. His power is not for enslavement or destruction but for ensouling and enriching. It is not sensual pleasure that one derives by coming in contact with a pure life. It is, we can almost say, other-worldly, ethereal. It is uplifting and ennobling. Again as Ruskin says about building and architecture, there is a vast difference between an ordinary life and a life built up with a purpose: though all people live, they alone live fruitfully who live with a perspective, a vision.

Mind as a tool

Architecture does not come out of nothing. It requires material and tools to produce it. What are the tools and material that go to form this architecture of man's life? As we said, the edifice of man's life is his character. It is a structure that is not perceived by the physical eyes but by the mind. To quote Sri Ramakrishna, 'Man does not grow two horns' when he becomes great. Neither the aura around him dazzle or pierce the eyes of ordinary mortals like the sun's rays. More practised eyes, that of a yogi, are necessary to discern such a phenomenon. In short no observable physical transformation takes place in man when he builds up his character; but the inner alchemy will be marvellous. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'the touch of the philosopher's stone transforms the iron sword into gold. The shape does not change but it can no more cut'. Similarly the resulting peace that flows in the wake of a pure life is its only indicator, its only criterion.

Now, the structure of character being subtle it naturally follows that the tools also must be of a finer grain. Mind is such an instrument. In Indian philosophy it is aptly named the *antahkarana*, the inner instrument. It is the one instrument which to a great extent controls the other instruments, the senses. Instruments also and not merely material, enter into the formation of a product. The excellence of the product and the speed with which it is turned out depend to a large extent on the precision instruments made available to the worker. Without the wheel and the rod a potter may manufacture some pots but they will not attain the finish one expects. With a blunt chisel we may break a stone but cannot carve an image. Likewise with a dull mind or a mind that rests satisfied with worldly things, nothing of value shall materialize. Such minds require chastening: sharpening, subduing and

sometimes treating with heat, beating into shape and tempering. The architect does all this with his tools either by himself or sends them to a smith. But the mind being subtle cannot be physically subjected to rigorous tests as you do with these tools.

Sacrifice as whetstone for the mind

What is the way? Our ancients found out the methods. The scriptures almost said: 'If you want to enjoy, why be satisfied with these mortal things and for a brief period? Go to heaven and enjoy divine imperishable things for a long time. But there are some stipulations. You have to restrict your enjoyments here. You have to acquire divine qualities. You have to acquire merit to go to heaven, to be one among the gods,' and for this they prescribed certain duties, and sacrifices. Ordinarily man thinks of himself and is very self-centred. He hugs to his bosom his wealth and is loathe to part with it. He hoards it and the more he hoards, the more he longs for it. He does not think beyond his own family circle. And when acquisition becomes the one aim of his life he throws propriety to the winds and stoops to any means. Such a tendency is dangerous, nay volcanic. This was to be counteracted. So man was taught to live a life of merit: 'to put by treasures in heaven'. On him was enjoined certain duties: Duty to the parents, to the Rishis, to the devas, to the neighbours and even to the animals, each of which went to liberalize him, to open the windows of his closed mansion of the mind, and brought in new visions. It drew him out of his shell; made him share his things with others and become humane. It helped him rise above the animal level. Thus sacrifice played the part of the fire, the hammer and the whetstone to mould, temper and sharpen the mind.

Meaning of sacrifice

In this idea of sacrifice is found the seed of self-abnegation, self-denial. For, whatever was considered most covetable on earth by man was enjoined to be offered to the Lord. Man was thus taught to renounce his claims on things desirable, not only ungrudgingly, but voluntarily. May be, there is a desire lurking in the heart of the sacrificer at the outset for gain in the next world, but by degrees when he comes to know that even heavens too are impermanent, that even what he enjoys in those regions is nothing better than here, these desires for enjoyment here and hereafter are annihilated. Having once learnt to give up, no sacrifice becomes too great for him then. He puts the need of the other man before his own. 'Thus by doing works alone should one desire to live a hundred years here. This way alone is open for you who desire not to he entangled by the effects of action here,'[2] says the lsavasya Upanisad. Sri Krishna forcefully puts this idea in the Gita thus: 'In this world work done other than for sacrifice leads to bondage.[3]

Whatever may have been the meaning with which the word yajna (sacrifice) was used in the beginning, it has come to have a wider import with the passage of time. The sense is no more restricted to the performance of some rituals in the fire. Sri Krishna extends and amplifies the meaning of sacrifice when he accepts, 'Others there are who sacrifice through gifts, others again who sacrifice through penance, still others who sacrifice through yoga and some others of austere vows are there who sacrifice through study and knowledge of Scriptures.'[4] His list does not end here but what he implies is, that whatever helps man to extend his mental horizon and expand his heart is a sacrifice. All ethics, all morality, all religions teach this one thing: self-sacrifice. Swami Vivekananda says: 'This Nivritti is the fundamental basis of all morality and all religion, and the very perfection of it is entire

self-abnegation, readiness to sacrifice mind and body and everything for another being.' Again he repeats: 'First kill your self and then take the whole world as your self; as the old Christians used to say, 'The old man must die'. This old man is the selfish idea that the whole world is made for our enjoyment.' When we say 'Thy will be done' we must have sacrificed our self to the will of the Lord. That is self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, the supreme sacrifice that man can make. Without this sacrifice none can be truly religious. It is becoming completely unselfish. Buddha taught nothing but self-sacrifice. He was ready to offer himself for the sake of even an animal. There was no limit to his self-abnegation.

True self-abnegation

Swamiji tells us a beautiful story to impress what really constitutes a sacrifice, a summary of which we give here: 'Once the Pandava brothers performed a great sacrifice. Rich gifts were given and much wealth was spent. People were amazed and declared that the world had not seen the like of it before. But there came a little mongoose half of whose body was golden and the other half brown. And, it began to roll on the floor of the sacrificial hall. Suddenly it cried out, "This is no sacrifice." People were astonished, they demanded from it the reason of such an uncharitable remark. In reply it said. "There was once a little village, and in it there dwelt a poor Brahmin, with his wife, son and the son's wife. They were very poor and lived on small gifts made to them for preaching and teaching. There came in that land a three years' famine, and the poor Brahmin suffered more than ever. At last when the family had starved for days, the father brought home one morning a little barley flour, which he had been fortunate enough to obtain, and he divided it into four parts, one for each member of the family. They prepared their meal with it and just as they were about to eat, there was a knock at the door. The father opened the door and there stood a guest. The poor Brahmin invited the guest and set his own food before him. The guest ate the food but his hunger was not appeased. Then one by one the other members of the family placed their food before the man and when the last morsel was exhausted the guest departed, blessing them. That night those four people died of starvation. A few grains of that flour had fallen on the floor and when I rolled on them half of my body became golden, as you see. Since then I have been travelling all over the world, hoping to find another sacrifice like that, but nowhere have I found one; nowhere else has the other half of my body been turned into gold. That is why I say this is no sacrifice." We are apt to miss the moral of the story if we read it casually as a fable. Every word of it is significant. The setting of the story is in a little village, the persons depicted are poor and the scene is a time of extreme trial. There was no fanfare of a sacrifice; no crowd to applaud, not even the remotest chance of any one knowing it. It was a sacrifice silently done and with no motive. That is self-abnegation; that is true sacrifice. We shall be able to follow better the trend of Swamiji's thought if we juxtapose with it another marvellous utterance of his: 'Even idiots may stand up to hear themselves praised, and cowards assume the attitude of the brave, when everything is sure to turn out well, but the true hero works in silence.'

Utility of self-abnegation

Now we come to the question of utility of this virtue of self-abnegation. The present generation is very calculative. It wants to know what it will obtain in return for any effort that it may put in. And necessarily it wants the return to be in a tangible form. For, it has lost faith

in the existence of the other world; the heavens have no more lure for it. The people of the age want everything here and now. Under the circumstances self-abnegation apparently seems to be of no earthly utility. If one had to sacrifice everything for another, what joy, what pleasure does one derive in this world? But our scriptures declare quite to the contrary. 'By giving up all this may you enjoy. Do not covet any One's wealth.'[5] exhorts the Sruti. What is meant by this? Does it not sound peculiar? Has any one enjoyed by giving up? By way of answering these questions we have to counter question ourselves. Whoever has enjoyed fully? Whoever has said 'I had my fill; I want no more; I am at peace by enjoying the things of the world'? Where is that man who can say he has been all blissful throughout? Let us take that instance in Buddha's life when a young mother felt very sore at the death of her only child and came to Buddha and prayed to him to revive her darling. 'Mother,' he had said, 'get me some white mustard seeds from a house that has known no bereavement and I shall revive thy child.' Thus he let her find out for herself that sorrow and joy alternated in this universe, and that there was more misery in it than joy. She would not have listened to Buddha if he had given her a sermon when her sorrow was acute; when the wound was fresh. But when she knew for herself, by her search, that not a home existed where there had not been some catastrophe at. one time or other, the few words that fell from the lips of the Blessed One were enough to cure her of her sorrow and to impress upon her the evanescence of these worldly objects. Earthly treasures cannot give one joy. Even if the wealth of the whole earth were made over to a man, he would desire still more. There is no end to his desire. Therefore it is only poetic to say that man enjoys by satisfying his desires. Pure bliss is not of this world. And about the bliss of the other world and the state of bodilessness (*jivanmukti*) we can know only from the scriptures and realized persons.

At this stage we may be asked: What then about those who do not believe in a God but in being mere moralists? Even in their case, we have no hesitation to repeat, what we have already stated, that self-abnegation forms the very basis, very foundation of all morality. As long as man says 'I' first and all others next there cannot be any morality. If everyone was to clamour for his own exclusive right and priority there would be no morality but brutality, the strong would overpower the weak, would try to crush them. Swamiji's categorical remarks in this context are worth noting: 'The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good, is not "I" but "thou". . . . Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan. The one lesson obvious to all is the destruction of the little self and the building up of the Real Self.'

Again it is not a fact that men are not aware of this idea of self-abnegation or that it is totally absent in the generality of mankind. The world would have gone to pieces if such were the case. In each individual we can find these two forces, acquisition and abnegation existing side by side. Even in the animals we can observe these traits. The tiger that plunges its fangs in the human blood is ready to give its life for its young ones. The man who commits murder is ready to sacrifice his life to serve his wife and children. Therefore what is wanted is the extended application of this idea of self-abnegation. Do not limit it to the circle of the family, whom you consider your own; or if you have to, make the whole world your family, your own; or 'enwrap everything in this universe by the Lord,'[6] as the Upanisad states. For, as Swamiji observes, 'This renunciation is the only positive power in the universe. The other (acquisition) is only the misguided employment of the power of love.'

And it is a tremendous power — this self-abnegation. All heads bow down before a

man of self-sacrifice. It was the ideal of the Brahmana in the days gone by. He never amassed money, never took to earning money. His profession was to read the scriptures and teach them free — not for any consideration — to those who came to him. The slender gifts that he received went to maintain himself and his students. Thus Brahmanahood symbolised supreme self-sacrifice. His was a life of austerity and penance, and that was why the Brahmana was given so high a place in society.

Self-abnegation versus selfishness

Our valuation of self-abnegation will not be complete or impressive if it is not contrasted with its opposite acquisition. Before proceeding to say how harmful this acquisition is in spiritual life, let us see how it has helped or ruined the world. History tells us what this demon of acquisition has done when it once entered into the veins of nations. Countries were overrun, blood flowed in rivers, cities were pillaged, people were enslaved and butchered. Man, the living image of God, reduced himself to a being much worse than a despised beast. The seeds of the world wars can be traced to this acquisition, to this selfishness. In the case of religion too it has been the same, only this selfishness went by the name of fanaticism in its case. This is the stark, ghoulish picture of selfishness. Which then will be humanity's choice, acquisition or self-abnegation? On this choice will rest the future of mankind.

In the life of the individual too it is possession that makes man selfish. Selfishness makes for attachment, makes us slaves, and this in turn engenders misery. Our goal is freedom from misery, liberation. Therefore, certainly acquisition is not the way to it. Sri Ramakrishna, with his characteristic simplicity and directness, narrates a parable to show into what turmoil these desires force us: 'It is narrated in the Bhagavata that the Avadhuta had twenty-four gurus, one of whom was a kite. In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed it. . . . As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: "That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace." ' Likewise man's miseries do not come to an end as long as he does not give up his desires which spring from the idea of possession, of selfishness, of 'I' and 'mine'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we shall recollect what Swami Vivekananda says about self-abnegation. He unequivocally declares: 'Without this renunciation no yoga is possible.' By giving up this little self alone can we come to know of the Higher Self. Attaining that, man becomes blessed, liberated, and enjoys 'peace that passeth all understanding' even here on earth. What better utility can there be than this? Further, the possessor of complete self-abnegation becomes a power that sheds light on the pathways to God. Such is the virility of the virtue of self-abnegation.

---

[1] Seven Lamps of Architecture. Pub.: George Allen, London, Seventh Edition (1898), p.13.
[2] Isa Up. 2.
[3] Bhagavad Gita, 3.9.

[4] Ibid., 4.28.
[5] Isavasya Up. 1.
[6] Isa Up. !.

By Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – August 1963; Vol. 50; page 128

Lives of great spiritual leaders are the best commentaries, the greatest illustrations of their own teachings. In them we find thought, speech and action working in consonance. As a popular Sanskrit verse elegantly puts it, 'the holy ones are one in mind, speech and action.' How simple this definition looks! But what a vast meaning is encompassed in it. As if in a sweep, it includes all the highest virtues man can conceive of. It means the inherence and manifestation of truthfulness, purity, sincerity, unselfishness, unbiased love and a score more of other virtues. It is a staggering list, no doubt, but that is the very reason that there are very rare souls that reach such dizzy heights of spiritual realization, such eminence. Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the need for 'making thought and word perfectly at one' as a discipline even for those who sought God in earnest. Swamiji writes to a disciple in Madras, 'Be holy and pure and the fire will come'. This was the keynote of all his teachings. Coming from Vivekananda these words had tremendous effect. They carried his vigour and enthused puissance into the reader. They were not mere words of encouragement but the products of the faith and conviction born of his own experience. He was never tired of repeating this formula, whether it was in conversations, dialogues or letters, to impress upon his audience the primacy of cultivating these virtues. In one of his letters he remarks, 'Be pure, staunch and sincere to the very backbone, and everything will be all right. If you have marked anything in the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna it is this — they are sincere to the backbone'.[1]

Place of Truth

And on what a high pedestal Swamiji did place truth! It was to him, as with his Master, the very foundation of spiritual life. 'Be not discouraged, one word of truth can never be lost; for ages it may be hidden under rubbish but it will show itself sooner or later. Truth is indestructible, virtue is indestructible, purity is indestructible,'[2] writes Swamiji in a letter to a disciple, with a certitude that can pierce through granite and cleave through all doubts. How was he able to do it? Because he was himself full of truth and nothing but that. Truth was with him a natural possession from his very childhood, and all through his life we see him struggling and fighting for it. One such urge brought him to Sri Ramakrishna and what marvellous effect it has produced in the world of thought and action, both in the East and the West! Yet this is but the beginning.

To get a little extended view of Swamiji's life we shall follow him through his peregrinations, through his travels in the foreign lands and just take an instance or two to learn how passionately attached to truth he was. sometimes at the risk of even estrangement from his best friends. We refer the reader to a letter written to Miss Mary Hale on 1st February, 1895, wherein he mentions about an excited argument he had with a Presbyterian

gentleman. 'Who,' he writes 'as usual got very hot, angry and abusive'. He continues, 'I was afterwards severely reprimanded by Mrs. Bull for this, as such things hinder my work. So it seems, is your opinion'. Both of these ladies were his staunchest supporters and well-meaning friends, but where truth was concerned he was no respecter of persons. Let us quote his own words, 'I know full well how good it is for one's worldly prospects to be sweet. I do everything to be *sweet*, but when it comes to a horrible compromise with the truth within, I then stop. ... I believe in Samadarsitvam — same state of mind with regard to all. The duty of the ordinary man is to obey the commands of his "God", society, but the children of light never do so. This is an eternal law.... The worshippers of "Vox populi" go to annihilation in a moment—the children of truth *live for ever.'*

It is no doubt true that the path of truth is not strewn with flowers, but a spiritual leader comes not to cater to the whims and fancies of a society and allow it to run to its ruin. He has a mission to fulfil — that of drawing society up towards him. The spiritual leaders know the hollowness of wealth, beauty, name and fame. So they resent and fight falsehood and expose it. They *know* that truth alone triumphs—not believe but *know*. Swamiji compares 'truth to a corrosive substance of infinite power. It burns its way in wherever it falls—in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must.' Continuing his letter he writes: 'I am so sorry, Sister, that I cannot make myself sweet and accommodating to every black falsehood. But I cannot. I have suffered for it all my life, but I cannot. I have essayed and essayed. But I cannot. At last I have given it up. The Lord is great. . . God of Truth; be Thou alone my guide! . . .What reason is there for me to conform to the vagaries of the world around me and not obey the voice of Truth within?'[3] That is what Swami Vivekananda symbolizes — Truth. Let us not think that after this correspondence either Miss Mary Hale or after the 'fight', as Swamiji calls it, Mrs. Bull, lost any regard, respect or admiration for Swamiji. On the other hand they stood by him till the end. Many were such instances in the life of Swamiji. But he never gave in. His mind instinctively recoiled from untruth.

Unselfishness

Now what did Swamiji mean by 'fire' in the sentence quoted above? It is the fire, the vigour, enthusiasm and energy to plunge undaunted into action, a determination to face all odds or die, for a noble cause. It is the fire of holiness and unselfishness which can achieve wonders. Swamiji declared on another occasion: 'But mind you, this is life's experience: if you really want the good of others, the whole universe may stand against you and cannot hurt you. It must crumble before your power of the Lord Himself in you, if you are sincere and really unselfish.'[4] He urged his followers to be totally unselfish. He used to quote often a Sanskrit verse which runs in the following strain: 'The wise one should give up wealth and even life for the sake of others. When death is certain, it is better to die for a good cause'. For, he said, that is the true way to make best use of our human life. Once when Ingersol said to Swamiji, 'I believe in making the most of the world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all we are sure of.' Swamiji replied: 'I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do and I get more out of it. . . . I know there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property. I can love all men and women. Every one is God to me. Think of the joy of loving man as God! Squeeze your orange this way, and get ten thousand fold more out of it. Get every single drop.'[5]

Mark the words 'believe' used by Ingersol and 'know' used by Swamiji. Whereas the former speaks from the plane of the five senses and is not sure of the outcome, Swamiji is

emphatic and certain, having been vouchsafed the vision of the Divine in everything long long before, at the feet of his Master. So the words that came out of his lips were from the innermost core of his being and had the stamp of authority.

Another time Swamiji declared: 'To be unselfish, perfectly selfless, is salvation itself for the man within dies, and God alone remains.' Here are the words of a sage, a seer, very clear and unambiguous and at the same time apparently showing an easy path to salvation. But it is to be worked out. Man must be intensely and motivelessly working for others, with not a thought of what will happen to himself. He himself did it. One of his American friends remarks: 'He did not seem to be conscious of himself at all. It was the other man who interested him.' Out of the fullness of the heart Swamiji spoke: 'You little know how nothing would be impossible for you in life if you labour day and night for others with your heart's blood! 'Again, he prophesies: 'Our best work is done, our greatest influence is exerted, when we are without thought of self.'

Love of humanity

But to be 'unselfish, perfectly selfless' we require a better basis than the mere exercise of the intellect. We should have the heart, the feeling, the love of humanity. Swamiji had it in ample measure and that was what sent him to America, to seek means to ameliorate the condition of the suffering masses of India. He had failed to get any response from the rich of his own country in this direction, and was struggling, as it were, in the jaws of death. He panted for direction from on High and when the anguish reached the climax, the command came. For him religiousness was not making long faces, nor was it looking down on others. 'Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness,' he stated. Let us not jump to the conclusion that we have this in abundance. Swamiji was aware of this fault of man and warned us against this self-complacency. He observes: 'I do not mean the sentimental statement that all men are brothers, but that one must feel the oneness of human life.' Many are ready to accommodate their brother as long as everything goes their way, as long as the brother does not cross their path. But as soon as their least interest is affected, woe unto the brother! This is not loving humanity. It is pure selfishness masquerading in the form of charity. Swamiji reiterates that no society in any country has come to that excellence 'where the effectiveness of individual self-sacrifice for the good of the many and oneness of purpose and endeavour actuating every member of the society for the common good of the whole, has been realized.' Let there be no misgivings about it. It can be done by a few, and the persons on whom God's choice falls must consider themselves blessed. There is no room for pride about it. Swamiji decisively points out: 'All are helped on by nature, and will be so helped even though millions of us were not here. The course of nature will not stop for such as you and me; it is only a blessed privilege to you and to me that we are allowed, in the way of helping others, to educate ourselves. . . . So drive out of your mind the idea that you have to do something for the world; the world does not require any help from you. It is sheer nonsense on the part of any man to think that he is born to help the world; it is simply pride, it is selfishness insinuating itself in the form of virtue.'[6] He was himself humble to the end.

An incident in the life of the Swami that occurred at the Belur Math in the year 1901 shows his love for the poor, in a touching way. Some Santal labourers were working at the Math premises then. Swamiji used to visit them and hear their tales of woe. Sometimes tears would come to the Swami's eyes when he heard them and then the narrator would stop his tale, entreat Swamiji to go away. One day while Swamiji was talking with them some people

of wealth and position came to see him. When he was told about the visitors, he said, 'I shan't be able to go now. I am quite happy with these people.' Another day he arranged to feed them with sweets and delicacies and when they had eaten to their satisfaction, Swamiji turned to a disciple and said, 'I actually saw the Lord Himself in them. How simple-hearted and guileless they are! 'And a little later addressing the Sannyasins and Brahmacharis of the Math he observed: 'See how simple-hearted these poor illiterate people are! Can you mitigate their misery a little? If not of what use is your wearing the gerua? . . . Alas! Nobody in our country thinks of the low, the poor and the miserable!' With the knowledge of history of the countries of the East and the West as background he prophetically remarked, 'Unless they (the masses) are raised, this motherland of ours will never awake.' 'You will be free in a moment, if you starve yourself to death by giving to another. If you will be perfect, you will become God,' said he on another occasion.

Purity of motive and sincerity of conviction

The motive power to work for humanity comes with renunciation, not merely outer, but inner also. There must not be any ulterior end in view at any time, prior, during or at the end of the work. That is purity of motive. This will not come unless sincere conviction, that the path chosen is sure to lead us to the goal, arises. Incidentally, we may point out, that sincerity of conviction and purity of motive form the groundwork of any other pathway, to spirituality, as well. Swamiji warns: 'Keep away from all insincere claimants to supernatural illumination.' Aye, that is the great hurdle that comes in spiritual life. We like to attain results quickly and without effort. Is it possible? No. But man is man. He knows it is impossible yet runs after the miraculous and the like. But those who are sincere, have the assurance of all the Great Ones, to which Swamiji too joins his voice: 'Truth, purity and unselfishness — wherever these are present, there is no power below or above the sun to crush the possessor thereof.' Is it not a reflection of his own life ?

Chastity

'Chastity in thought, word, and deed, always, and in all conditions,' said Swamiji, 'is what is called Brahmacharya.' Than Swamiji there can be no better authority to speak on the value of chastity. He was pure as purity can be. Sri Ramakrishna said of him that he was like a blazing fire. The Master said, 'Maya stood ten steps away from Naren. She could not catch him in her net.' Let us, therefore, hear Swamiji's opinion about this virtue: 'It is only the chaste man or woman who can make the Ojas rise and store it in the brain, that is why chastity has always been considered the highest virtue.' 'Without chastity there can be no spiritual strength. Continence gives wonderful control over mankind. The spiritual leaders of men have been very continent, and this is what gave them power.' Referring to his plan of education he said, 'It is *gurugrihavasa*, living with the teacher that I would prescribe,' for that meant a life of celibacy. 'Everybody should be trained to practise absolute Brahmacharya and then only faith and shraddha will come. . . . Simply by the observance of strict Brahmacharya (continence) all learning can be mastered in a very short time. One has an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country,' remarked Swamiji on

various occasions. Will the nation heed? It would be the best way of honouring Swamiji if it did. For it is the working out of his ideas, and not his name, that he liked to see.

Swamiji's personality

Commissioned by Divine Providence to preach the gospel of Vedanta, of tolerance, of spirituality he, it is hardly necessary to state, was well-equipped with all these and more. We have seen here, in a few of his teachings that we have discussed, that he never taught anything that he himself had not practised. As in the case of these teachings so too was he an exemplar in the love of God, and other virtues that he asked us to cultivate. This can be observed by anyone who cares to go through his life. We shall now conclude by a reference to the remarks of those, specially from the critical West, who had the opportunity to come in close contact with him.

Swamiji's personality was imposing and impressive. He had a regal bearing and a casual observer would take him to be a Rajah (a Prince). Here is a news item from the *Framingham Tribune*, which has recently been brought to light; it reads:

Friday, August 25, 1893.

Holliston: Miss Kate Sanborn, who has recently returned from the West, last week entertained the Indian Rajah, Swami Vivekananda. Behind a pair of horses furnished by liveryman F. W. Phipps, Miss Sanborn and the Rajah drove through town on Friday en route for Hunnewell's.[7]

This news item, appearing in a journal of a remote town, has its own importance and significance; and more so when it happens that Swamiji had not yet attained the fame and celebrity, which, after the Parliament of Religions, was his. This proves that his was a personality that could not be hidden.

It is also interesting to note that he left deep, abiding and loving memories with whomsoever he came in contact. Witness Mrs. Wright's letter to her mother which has recently come to light:

Annisquam, Mass.
August 29, 1893.

"Dear Mother,

We have been having a queer time. Kate Sanborn had a Hindoo monk in tow as I believe I mentioned in my last letter. John went down to meet him in Boston and missing him, invited him up here. He came Friday! In a long saffron robe that caused universal amazement. He was a most gorgeous vision. He had a superb carriage of the head, was very handsome in an oriental way, about thirty years old in time, ages in civilization. He stayed until Monday and was one of the most interesting people I have yet come across. We talked all day all night and began again with interest next morning. The town was in a fume to see him; the boarders at Miss Lane's in wild excitement. They were in and out of the Lodge constantly and little Mrs. Merrill's eyes were blazing and her cheeks red with excitement. Chiefly we talked religion. It was a kind of revival, I have not felt so wrought up for a long time myself! Then on Sunday John had him invited to speak in the Church and they took up

a collection for a Heathen College to be carried on on strictly heathen principles — whereupon I retired to my corner and laughed until I cried.'[8]

Here are given the circumstances that brought Prof. J. H. Wright and Swamiji together. How this meeting helped Swamiji, to get entry into the Parliament of Religions as a delegate, is a matter of history too well-known to need repetition. But mark the impression left by Swamiji during that short visit.

We shall now quote from a letter of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, journalist and poet, to Mrs. Kate Tannatt Woods who had sometime played hostess to Swamiji. Of course this letter is of a later date (May, 1895) but it shows how the correspondent, who was one among the audience of Swamiji, felt about his personality. She writes:

'I was listening to Vivekananda this morning an hour. How honoured by fate you must feel to have been allowed to be of service to this Great Soul. I believe him to be the reincarnation of some great Spirit — perhaps Buddha — perhaps Christ! He is so simple — so sincere, so pure, so unselfish. To have listened to him all winter is the greatest privilege life has ever offered me. It would be surprising to me that people could misunderstand or malign such a soul if I did not know how Buddha and Christ were persecuted and lied about by small inferiors. His discourse this morning was most uplifting — his mere presence is that. His absolute sinking of self is what I like.'[9]

How enormously he should have touched the deep chords of their hearts to make them spontaneously pour out their adorations and encomiums on him! What a divine joy should have been brimming in their hearts to make them desire to share it with others! Yet speech is but a poor messenger of the heart. If even that sends a thrill through one's being, how greater should have been the feelings aroused in those hearts! One can feel it only when one comes across such a holy one. As words and descriptions can carry little meaning of what an ocean is, so too these letters convey but a faint echo of the resurrection of those hearts. Perhaps one can imagine it a little. But imageries will fall far far short of the real feeling. The magnitude of the spiritual benefit one can receive by a sight, a touch or communion with such spiritual luminaries is unfathomable. These letters, which form but a fraction of the few that have come to light, are living evidences of the soothing influence, like that of a cool mountain breeze, his sublime life breathed wherever he happened to be; nay even more, wherever his message spread. His life, like those of others of his eminence are verifications of the scriptural statements. These lives reiterate the scriptures and reimburse them with energy and vigour.

Finally let us reproduce from what Miss Sarah Farmer, the founder of the summer School for the Comparative Study of Religions, at Green Acre, wrote to the Vedanta Society of New York about the year 1902, after the passing away of Swamiji:

'To know Swami Vivekananda was a renewed consecration; to have him under one's roof was to feel empowered to go forth to the children of men and to help them all to a realization of their birthright as Sons of God. What Green Acre owes to him cannot be put into words. A little band of people had started to prove the providing care of God for those who only rely upon Him in utter faith and love. This great soul came into our midst and did more than any other to give to the work its true tone, for he lived every day the truth which his lips proclaimed and was to us the living evidence of the power manifested nineteen

hundred years ago, in that he went about his Father's business in perfect joyousness and childlike trust, without "purse or script" and found all promises fulfilled, all needs met. Forever after, as he grew in knowledge and power, his influence increased among us and helped to strengthen our faith, and today his power for good is even greater and will continue to be, if we are true to Him who worketh in us "to will and to do His good pleasure".'[10]

Such then was Swami Vivekananda, an embodiment of the highest virtues he preached.

---

[1] Works, Vol.V,p.44 Epistles.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.,p. 56,57.
[4] Ibid. Vol.VIII, p.83, 'My Life and Mission."
[5] Works, Vol. VII, p.75, Inspired Talks.
[6] Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 87-88.
[7] Swami Vivekananda in America, New Discoveries by Marie Louise Burke, pub. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, page 16.
[8] Ibid., page 20.
[9] Ibid., page 29.
[10] The Brahmavadin, January, 1903, pages 56-57.

Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – September 1963; Vol. 50; page 330

With all the pride of civilization and with all the scientific advancement man still, sometimes, finds himself in situations in which neither of these could help him. Why is it so? What then is the purpose of a civilization that cannot stand us in good stead when we are in dire need of help? What is wanting in our civilization that makes it impotent in the face of calamities? Again it has been observed that an inordinate tension exists, specially, in the minds of people who do not lack luxuries nor are in dearth of variety in entertainments. If material benefits and wealth alone could have been the source of illimitable happiness, then why do we find misery in the lap of luxury? These are questions that are engaging the minds of the intelligentsia today. One modern thinker aptly asks, ‘Has civilization been able to end poverty, starvation and war?’ The very fact that these questions are making headway and demand immediate attention is in itself an indication that all is not well with our civilization; something is lacking, wanting. The causes are to be analysed and treated with utmost deliberation and speed.

Our analysis would be that humanity has been fed, for over three centuries now, with doctrines which teach elimination of the spiritual aspect in man. Man has been asked to subsist on the dry bones of logic, with the consequence that a maladjusted and malformed stratum has emerged in society. There is a mythical story in the Indian epics, the conclusion of which may bear a striking resemblance to this stratum. Let us state it briefly: There was a king named Trishanku. By his misbehaviour he earned the wrath of his spiritual preceptor. However, when he desired to go to heaven in his physical frame he approached the latter to help him. The preceptor would not agree to perform any such sacrilegious sacrifice. He plainly told him that it was impossible for a human being to reach heaven in a mortal body. Dissatisfied with his answer the king went to the preceptor’s sons and craved their help. Coming to know of his audacity to approach them when their respected father had refused help, they cursed him that he may be dull in mind, lose lustre and be of uncouth appearance. Sorely disappointed but not still cowed down, he approached a teacher, who had lived in antagonism to his family guru, and poured out to him his tale of woe. That preceptor did indeed help him to go to heaven; but the gods looking at his ugly mien banished him and thrust him out. He fell head downwards from there to the earth. As he fell he cried out to his benefactor to save him. The preceptor, who was no doubt a man of great powers, asked him to stay where he was. The story tells us that he stayed, but in a place neither here nor there and certainly not in an enviable state. It is said that he still continues to hang with his head down in between the heaven and the earth. That is the precarious condition in which the above mentioned strata of society finds itself today. But fortunately the disease has not yet touched the common man. He has still not lost his moorings. He has belief in a higher Being, to whom he can unload his worries. He has faith that the Lord will answer his prayers if he but truly calls on Him.

There are three things in man which clamour for satisfaction, the body, the mind and the spirit. But the basis of all is the spirit. It is the neglect of the spirit that makes any civilization lame and uncertain about its future. It may for a time appear to thrive hut then when it fails, it does so miserably, leaving only broken ramparts and moss-tilled moats to display its onetime vain glory in all its sadness. Yet no one questions one's right to serve one's body or mind. None can deny the value of a healthy body, nor of a sharp intellect; both are necessary. But what is hinted at is that they should not be made exclusive pursuits. The other side (the spirit) also is to be cultivated.

Several paths to the cultivation of the spirit

And this cultivation of the spirit can be done in several ways, viz. by control of the *Prana* (vital force), by doing work unattached to results, by knowledge of the Self, and by devotion or love of God. Our subject brings us to the last path in particular but it also includes others in a general way. We all know the path of devotion or love of God is meant for persons whose nature is predominantly emotional in character. But let us not be carried away by the thought that we can be exclusively emotional or exclusively rationalistic. It is not possible. A human being is a conglomeration of many faculties. Even the murderous dacoit who is supposed to be cruelty personified, has a soft side to his nature. Perhaps he murders and loots for the maintenance of a loving family at home. So is the case with every other faculty. All the faculties are present in man, only the degree of manifestation of each varies in different persons. According to the degree of manifestation of a particular faculty, one's nature is said to be emotional, rationalistic or active. A man without feelings would be inert, like wood or stone. And a mere emotional man without strength to work, nor intellect to discriminate can only be a nervous wreck. And certainly religion does not propose to turn men into wood or stone nor into nincompoops. To an emotional nature, however, worship singing of devotional songs, and prayer appeal most. He can make rapid progress in spiritual life by having recourse to these.

What is prayer

Prayer is a supplication to a higher power, invoking blessings or forgiveness for transgressions, trespasses and errors committed. Used in the religious sense however, it has been branded as superstition. But why? Do not men when they are in tribulations or when they want to obtain the grace of a great person, wait on him? Do they not supplicate in the most abject fashion? Prayer, entreaty, supplication are therefore not unknown to man. But the idea seems to be that it is all right if they do it for material gains but it is bad when people do it for spiritual upliftment! Is this not a perverted way of viewing at things? If such an attitude is kept up, we can never arrive at the true perspective of things. First, therefore, be bold enough to apply the same standard of judgment to yourself as you would like to apply it to others. Ponder over it, study it and you will find that in what terms the man of the world prays for worldly things, in the very same terms or even more honourable, the man of the spirit prays for enlightenment. Why then should it be called superstition?

Universal prayers

It now remains to be discerned whether prayers universal in character exist or can be evolved ? What type of prayers can be universal? Hinduism consists of so many sects but there are some fundamentals which are common to all of then. Every sect believes in the authority of the Vedas. The Vedas, which include the Vedanta or the Upanishads, have given us some of the most wonderful prayers which can be chanted by anyone, living anywhere without the least fear of losing their affinity to their own religion. Here for instance, we have the peace incantation which a student offers everyday before he begins his studies: 'Om. Lead me from the unreal unto the real, from darkness unto light, from death unto immortality.' The student prays for enlightenment, to walk in the path of god, to endear himself to Him. God being the only reality he wants Him. God being the only light of all lights he wants to walk in His light. There being no mortality in God he wants to live in Him. A doubt may arise: Where do we live now? Do not the scriptures say we live, move and have our being in Him? True. But are we conscious of it? Not being conscious of it, is darkness. Not being conscious of it, again, is unreality. Do not the scriptures say, 'All this is Brahman'? So this prayer is only to make us conscious of it, at all times and under all circumstances. When man is conscious in this way, consistently and constantly, he is said to have realized God. Then he sees God inside and outside of himself. Thus did our ancient culture lay the basis of our education. From a very early period children were taught to think rightly, as can be seen from this prayer. The peace that the student invokes again, is not for himself alone, it is for the whole society.

Did not then the student ask anything for himself? Yes, he did ask. He even asks for health to enjoy life — only in the righteous way, not at the cost of others, nor in a beastly fashion. He prays: 'O gods, may we hear with our ears, only what is auspicious; may we see what is only auspicious with our eyes O ye worshipful ones; may we sing praises to ye, and by our strong body and limbs may we enjoy the life allotted to us by the gods. May there be peace.' Again: 'Let my speech be established in my mind and mind be established in speech. O self-manifested One do Thou manifest Thyself unto me. May my mind and speech be efficient to reveal the highest knowledge. May I not forget what I have heard. By what I have learnt I shall support myself by day and by night. I will speak the right. I will speak the truth. May That Divinity protect me. May it protect the preceptor.' Here are two of the many Vedic prayers which are of the most general character. There is nothing debasing in them nor covetousness of any sort. The desire to enjoy also is circumscribed and conditioned. He wants protection only if and when he walks in the righteous path. The aim, however, is realization of God. The saints and sages of a later period too have sung paeans of a similar nature, one of which, because of its all-embracing character, we can hardly resist the temptation to quote: 'May all be blissful, may all be free from diseases, may all see what is auspicious, may not any one be miserable.' What a grand conception! Does it not make us—at least for the short time that we will be repeating it or dwelling on it—feel one with the universe, feel the affinity to every creature that is in the creation? Is it wrong to wish for the welfare of the whole universe? If not, how can such prayers be called superstitions?

There are, of course, other prayers by wore shippers of different aspects of God in praise of the particular forms of the Deity. In all of them the same inner current of love of God and a desire to open out, to expand beyond one's own self can be seen.

Is prayer necessary for all types of aspirants?

We shall now revert to our proposition that prayer is necessary and forms an

important element of spiritual life. From the universal character of the prayers, above quoted, it is clear that there can be no gainsaying the fact that they are beneficial to all types of aspirants. If a man is of active temperament his desiring to do good will receive added strength from wishing well to every being. A question may arise in our minds as to the necessity of prayer for a man devoted to the path of knowledge. But we forget that it is he who studies the scriptures most and these scriptures enjoin the chanting of the peace incantations before they are studied. Again, it is by repeating the texts which speak of the evanescence of the world and by reminding oneself of them constantly that one discriminates between the real and the unreal. There are a myriad of them — the hymns that speak of the glory of the Self. We shall give here only one instance of it. It is a morning prayer which runs as follows: 'I meditate at dawn within my heart on the Self-effulgent Atman, the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, the goal of the supreme ascetics, transcendental and eternal, who is beyond the states of waking, dream and deep sleep. That Brahman I am, not a combination of material elements.'

Then comes the prayer to the preceptor, who is the manifest form of God on earth. He it is who ferries us across the ocean of *samsara* and therefore we are in duty bound to express our gratitude and adoration to him.

Prayers exist in every language and in every part of the world, maybe in poetical form, maybe in plain prose. Even the illiterate have them, handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation in the form of folk songs. Sri Ramakrishna set great store by prayer as a spiritual discipline. He emphasized its necessity and efficacy time and again. He has taught us how to pray, by himself setting an example. As to the form of address he was not particular. He said, 'God like a benevolent father would understand in whatever way you call on Him, and in whichever way you address Him.' Only thing he insisted on was sincerity in our prayer. When someone had suggested that people should be taught how to look upon God, Sri Ramakrishna's characteristic remark had been, 'Who can truly know God? He is One, He is many; again, He is beyond both. One glass of water is enough to slake my thirst, why should I want to know how many gallons of water is in the reservoir? So call upon God in any way you like and even if you do not know what He is, do not despair, pray to Him, "O Lord I know not whether you are with form or formless, please condescend to reveal yourself to me."' This form of prayer would appeal to everyone; even unbelievers saw nothing objectionable in this. They prayed. Their prayers were answered. Thus were they converted and won over to God by Sri Ramakrishna. 'O Lord, I have attributed forms to Thee, who art formless, in my meditation. By my praise O Thou Teacher of the Universe I have denied Thy indescribableness. By going on pilgrimage and such other things, I have repudiated Thy omnipresence. These three trespasses of mine, O Lord, pray forgive me,' sings a devotee bringing to the fore the incomprehensibleness of God. Therefore instead of trying to know what God is, let us try to gain admittance to His presence.

What should we pray for

People pray no doubt, but what do they pray for? Usually most of the people want something from God and that is why they pray. Progeny, wealth and the like are some of their positive wants. Getting rid of diseases, overcoming tribulations are some of the negative wants that they desire God to fulfil. But is that what we should pray for? Definitely not. Sri Ramakrishna's prayer in this respect is an eye-opener. He prays to the Divine Mother: 'Mother here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice, take them both and give me pure love

for Thee.' He did not want anything except devotion for the Mother's feet. Swami Vivekananda prayed for discrimination, renunciation, knowledge and love of God, even when the billows of domestic calamities were closing over his head. That is the proper type of prayer — to want nothing except God, desire nothing except His presence.

Efficacy of Prayer

What is the science behind this prayer, that is, how does it actually act? First of all it is to be remembered that God is not someone who is far, far away, that He is very close to us.[1] Much of the difficulty we experience now to comprehend the efficacy of prayer will be got over if we recall this. He is the Soul of our souls. He dwells in our hearts.[2] Who else can then be more aware of our thoughts, our desires, our intentions and our resolutions than He? Will He then, when He hears our call, not respond? As a loving father He will. So those who trust in God carry their load lightly. A tranquillity spreads over their souls. They neither seek nor avoid company. Human sympathy, they do not desire. For it is so volatile that at the first whiff of the winds of misfortune it all evaporates. But we can depend upon the Lord's succour. He never deserts. He remains constant. We may even make our demands on Him as does a son for his patrimony says Sri Ramakrishna. This however, can be done only if we get to know Him intimately. So through prayer and other disciplines we have to make our way to His citadel, and then everything will be all right.

The Lord finds Himself bound by the ties of love when the devotee prays to Him. Nay, He finds that He owes to the devotee a deep debt and finds Himself entangled in a bond that is indissoluble. Speaking about His love for the Pandavas Sri Krishna says: 'The obligations on My part have ever grown and they can never be repaid, the gratitude can never be taken away from My heart.' Draupadi prayed in anguish to Him for help knowing full well that Krishna was far away at that time. But her prayer was answered. The love of the Pandavas to the Lord even in their direst of calamities has very few parallels. That is why Krishna later says to Duryodhana: 'The Pandavas whom you hate O king are my life breath.'

Earnestness in Prayer

Generally people want to gain much with little effort, so when they find their prayers—which are naturally half-hearted and endowed with little faith—are not answered, they give up and turn agnostics. They say: 'Oh this prayer and all such things are mere superstition! I have done it all without any result.' But actually had they been earnest in their prayer they would have had a different story to tell. No considerations of wealth or personal gain would have crept into their minds then. An instance of the type of love that asks nothing except for God Himself is that of the gopis, the cowherdesses of Vrindavana —theirs was not trading in love as Swami Vivekananda beautifully puts it. It was a dedication. And when such dedication comes the prayer that comes to one's lips is a spontaneous one, it wells up as it were from the heart. It is untainted by selfish consideration. The lives of the saints and seers are instances to show what prayer—which is natural to man —can do. Let not false pride stand in our way of prayer, nor let us pray for the sake of ostentatiousness. May we in true faith take to prayer.

NOTE: Some notes and references present in the original are absents in this paper because they are in the Sanskrit script.

---

[1] Isa Up. 5.
[2] Gita, 18.61.

VALUE OF PRACTICE IN RELIGION

Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – October 1963; Vol. 50; page 373

There was a time, and that not very distant, when religion was considered by some as the opium of the infirm, and the invalids. But that age has passed or is passing away. The materialistic science, which impinged this thought on the world, failed to propound an alternative principle which could give man eternal solace. It had to eat the humble pie and refrain from blowing its trumpets of triumph, when all it could offer in exchange came in the form of competition, strife and destruction. The two world wars have shown this and the Damocles' sword of the third war has frightened the supporters of materialism into silence. Besides, a greater awakening to the truths of Vedanta — which took up the challenge of science to religion boldly and proved that the content of true religion was sound and that it alone could lend support to life — has badly shaken the theories of scientists that they could do away with religion as of no import. The advent of the twin personalities, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, on to the stage of the world, and their illuminating lives have rejuvenated the faith of the doubters and imparted *sraddhã* even into the faithless. For they based their arguments not on words but on deeds. There was ocular evidence of spiritual vigour and attainments in their case and an earnest seeker who went to them obtained something tangible, something solid, in the form of spirituality. There was little speculation in their teaching. It was all here and now. Everything was definite about God, without being dogmatic. This can be, without any hesitation, said to be the turning point in the history of the world, though it may still take time before it is acknowledged or fully realized. But acknowledged or not, there is clearly written in bold letters, as it were, that the scientific methods of Vedanta had completely upset the apple-cart of the material scientists.

How was Vedanta able to do it? In India, by religion was meant something which was practical. It was not an aid to either politics or social developments nor a curio meant for decoration, as it happens to be in some other parts of the world. In India religion was for its own sake, therefore the ancients were bent upon making it most practicable, livable. There is not a principle in Vedanta which could not be put into practice. Vedanta is not only a speculation but also a practice and a realization. It is not from the erudition in the presentation of the philosophy that the eminence of a person is judged, but how far he had been able to put that philosophy into practice. Sri Ramakrishna's words in this regard are final and bring out the importance practice bears to our soul's well-being. He says: 'I consider a pundit (scholar) without any asset of *sãdhana* (practice) to his credit as mere straw. Such pundits are like vultures that soar high in the sky when all the while their eyes are fixed on the charnel pit below.' How true it is! Unless one practises spiritual disciplines the longing for the things of the world do not abate in the least. It is being proved everyday by science that one has to go beyond the gravitational pull before one can manoeuvre freely, with safety, in space. So too, unless the pull, the drag of the world is nullified it is

impossible to rise beyond the worldly attractions. What an amount of power they put in the rocket that fires a ship into space! Once in there, however, the occupant is safe and can at will come down. That is exactly what the science of religion professes to teach: To rise beyond the gravitation of the worldly desires. But the power is to be built by oneself. No one can do it by proxy, though everyone would have liked to benefit if such were the case.

Practice: The Sign of Earnestness

There is a sequence of events, rather a succession of actions that settle, that signify whether a man is earnest about religion or not. He may profess vehemently but unless he practises spiritual disciplines, in India at least, he is not believed to be of any consequence as a religious person. Neither can he hoodwink people for all time, though some may be duped for sometime. Like the counterfeit coin he gets caught when observed at close quarters. So practice is a necessary limb of religion. Take even the ordinary arts like music or painting: What pains does not one take to play on a single musical instrument, be though it may, even to a moderate success; what labour does not one put in to culture one's voice in singing or to become even a third rate painter? How many years does one not spend in these pursuits! Does one consider it a waste? There is an earnestness in such people, so no effort seems too much for them. Why then should not religion which reveals the inner beauty of the soul not attract as much attention; make us as much earnest? Swamiji picturesquely brings this out: 'What an amount of attention does business require, and what a rigorous taskmaster it is! Even if the father, the mother, the wife or the child dies, business cannot stop! Even if the heart is breaking we still have to go to our place of business, when every hour of work is a pang. That is business, and we think it is just, that it is right.' Have we at least this much of application to religion? Swamiji says, 'This science calls for more application than any business can ever require.' Unless earnestness gets hold of you, you will not practise. And earnestness comes when religion is sought for its own sake, and not as a means to something else.

The purport of religion is one thing, and one thing alone, that is realization of God, liberation from this round of births and deaths, 'being and becoming' as Swami Vivekananda aptly describes it. And every true religion emphasizes this. Christ said, 'If thou will be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.'[1] He did not stop with that. He continued: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'[2] The Upanisads say, 'Not by action, nor by progeny or wealth but by renunciation alone immortality was reached by some.'[3] 'Establish your mind in Me alone and in Me alone merge your intellect. And then, after the fall of the body, you will, without doubt, live in Me alone,'[4] says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gitã. Thus every prophet has vouched to the fact that religion means practice of renunciation and culture of other good virtues. And practice alone testifies to earnestness. Wheresoever there is non-compliance of this fundamental principle there can be no true religion, however much it may be lauded, however much it may be of utilitarian value. In short, there cannot be a comfortable religion, if we can but properly assess the ideas contained in the quotations cited above.

Religion is not in frothy words

Having defined what religion is, we like to point out what it is not. For more often

than not the wrong is taken to be the right and vice versa. It has been a practice with some to condemn, vilify and downgrade other sects and other religions, so much so that it has become their second nature. 'They cannot glorify their religion without condemning others. But is this necessary? We think not. If one's religion is good and great it must be able to convert one into the image of God whom one worships. If not, it is simply lip service they are offering to religion. They are interested in argumentation and fights and not in bringing religion into themselves. Swami Vivekananda rightly points out: 'The very fact of these disputations and fightings among sects shows that they do not know anything about religion. Religion to them is a mere mass of frothy words, to be written in books…They fight and talk about religion, and do not want it.' When we leave off all these vain talks and seek God alone then we are on the path. For 'This Atman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, nor by intellect, nor even by much learning. By him alone it is attained whom It chooses — to him Atman reveals Itself in Its real form,' [5] says the Upanisad.

Purpose of Practice

As we have said, religion proposes to make man realize his own nature, which is divinity, perfection. It makes us kindle the flame of infinite knowledge; a light that dispels all darkness once and for all time. But it cannot be done in a day. There are so many things that have covered the lamp of our Atman, so many obstacles and encrustations in the form of attachments. These are to be removed and then only can we reach the lamp. We know that the mind is the seat of all attachment and aversions, in fact of all that man is. It is the store-house of all previous impressions and repository of all knowledge too. Every thought man thinks, every action he does leaves an impress on the mind and the sum total of these go to form his character. Impelled by the previous *samskãras* an ordinary man acts. It is the purpose of practice to overcome the vicious tendencies that have gathered in the mind, to purify it. This can be done by creating new and good possibilities. 'The evil tendencies are to be counteracted by good ones,' says Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*. To think good thoughts and do good actions and check the mind from swerving away from the righteous path is practice. But it is a difficult task. Sri Krishna exhorts in the *Gita*, 'Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed one, the mind is of a fickle nature and cannot be easily controlled, but O son of Kunti, by practice and renunciation it can be subdued.'[6]

Practice is a struggle no doubt but through struggle alone everything grows. For our very existence we have to struggle. Much as we would like it, there is no alchemy by which man turns overnight into a saint. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that mere knowledge that there is fire in the firewood cannot cook the rice; one must light the fire and put the pot of rice on it, then only will it cook. Again he said: 'Merely uttering "hemp!" "hemp!" does not make one intoxicated. One must bring it, grind it and drink it and then only will one feel the intoxication.' Likewise, merely uttering 'religion', 'religion' does not make a man religious. Swamiji remarks: 'We want to strike the light in a second, but we forget that the making of the candle is the chief thing.' Without the candle where will you light the flame. And in making the candle is all the struggle; when once it is made the lighting takes but little time. Sri Ramakrishna compared this struggle to a boatman's rowing in the winding alleys of the river. The boatman has to struggle hard, no wind can help him there. But once he has gained the main current of the river, he hoists his sail finding a favourable wind, leans back and enjoys a smoke. It is smooth sailing from then on. He has only to hold the rudder slightly steady and the boat reaches the destination safely. This is the purpose of

practice: not to get stuck up in the brambles and bushes, to steer clear of the sand dunes and avoid being swept into shallow waters and running aground. It is not a shot in the dark, not an unexpected chance that man is asked to take, by practising religious disciplines; the Yoga practices have scientifically demonstrated how man can rise in the ladder of spirituality with full awareness of his progress. You do certain practices and then attain certain perceivable results.

What to practise?

It now remains to be said what one must practise. Though there are many paths and various disciplines there are certain fundamentals which are common to all the paths. Taking the name of the Lord, prayer, meditation are some of them. But there are some preliminaries which help an aspirant in the practice of these. One of them, the most important one, is the desire for liberation, *mumuksutvam*. It is also the primary condition of religious life. When this condition is fulfilled others follow as a matter of course. If there is no real yearning for liberation, religious life becomes dull and drab. On the other hand, the desire for liberation being present even the harshest of disciplines become enjoyable and their sharpness fails to cut into the mind. The malady with the world is that it sees the unreal as the real. Let us be clear here about this reality: By reality we mean that which exists at all times, nay in which even time exists. If this definition is firmly grasped there should be no scope for miscomprehension. No one, not even the Advaitist says that this world is an illusion as we comprehend an illusion to be. What he says has been twisted and tortured to make him look ridiculous. What he says is that the world is not real as God is. And this is the basis of all religious life: To discriminate between the real and the unreal. Even a bhakta has to concede that God alone is real, otherwise how could he abstain from being attached to the things of the world?

Real spiritual life begins when man discriminates between the real and the apparent and rejecting the apparent clings to the real. The next disciplines are control of the senses and the mind, forbearance and repose of the mind. With long practise of these disciplines man's mind becomes purified and in the purified mind God is reflected, says Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing God face to face and knowing Him intimately alone is religion said Sri Ramakrishna time and again. So practice too must lead us to this and if it does not, it is time that we reassessed the motive that is hidden in our mind. Yet it must be conceded that some attain success more easily than others. The reason may be that the intensity of the longing for God in one case is more than that of the others, for does not Swami Vivekananda say, 'What want is there without its object outside? 'When the want is intense it will be fulfilled. And this wanting will be expressed in the practice. That is the value of practice in religion. Finally, let us recall what Swamiji says about religion and practice: 'Religion is ever a practical science, and there never was nor will be any theological religion. It is practice first, and knowledge afterwards.'

---

[1] Gospel of St. Mathew, 19.21.
[2] Ibid., 19.24.
[3] Kaivalyopanishad, 1.3.
[4] Gita, 12.8.
[5] Kathopanishad, 2.23.
[6] Gita, 6.35.

WHAT IS MAYA?

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – November 1963; Vol. 50; page 413

Appearance and Reality

Often we are confronted with this term Mãyã and more often than not has it been misconstrued and misinterpreted. It has been translated as illusion in English and this has given rise to all the confusion. But, for an impartial observer and thinker all this need not necessarily be so. He sees almost a parallel between the scientific theories of today and Mãyã.

Take for instance the first proposition of the doctrine of Mãyã: viz. that appearance is not reality. It appears real because something else which forms its substratum is real. This is also what science tells us. Let us take some concrete examples instead of beating about the bush in a maze of words. What revolutionary changes have not the common conceptions, regarding ordinary phenomena, undergone! A thousand years ago people accepted the world as a flat piece of surface and there were very queer ideas regarding how it was held in position. Do we believe in such stuff now? If anyone does he will be considered as coming from the neolithic age, though modern science is not so old as that. It was only when Columbus, who said that he could reach India going round the world, if the other route was not available and when he did succeed to a certain extent, that there was some sort of belief in the statement that the world was round.

Again, we say the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Even now this phraseology has not changed, but does the sun go round the earth as it appears to the ordinary eye. No, says the scientist. It is the earth that is moving round the sun, as also on its own axis. This latter rotation produces the night and the day, whereas the former movement the seasons. Another wonderful theory or fact, whatever you may like to call it, of science is that our earth is moving at a tremendous velocity on its own axis - the rate is approximately 17.5 miles per minute. Yet we do not feel the impact of such a speed. For us the earth seems to be stationary. Then there are many other things than these which very powerful telescopes and a practised eye at that alone could find out. For instance it was recently discovered by 'Soviet and American astronomers simultaneously and independently that one of the most distant visible galaxies, 3C-273, is changing in brilliance.'

'The spectrum of 3C-273 shows that it is receding from us at about 30,000 miles a second — hundreds of times faster than any stars in our own galaxy could possibly be moving — hence its identification as a galaxy.

"'Hitherto variable radiation has been observed only in stars and no one has even suspected that galaxies, too, can change their brilliance."

'The mass of this mysterious space colossus must be millions of times greater than

the mass of our Sun.

'The very existence of such superstars was regarded as impossible until very recently.' [1]

We can go on piling up evidence to prove that what people fondly believed once about the world had to be discarded and new faiths, formulated according to scientific theories, were to be cultivated. But our purport being to show that the world cannot be taken as it appears even from the standpoint of science, these few illustrations must suffice. The doctrine of Mãyã does not demand any more than this recognition: that appearance has a conditional existence and when the condition varies the existence also undergoes a change, in short, it is not eternally real.

Mãyã as Ignorance

Before going into the nature of Mãyã let us see how it has been generally construed. Mãyã is described by one of the Upanisads, as *prakrti* and the wielder of Maya as Iswara. [2] It is also called ignorance. Ignorance need not necessarily always mean the absence of worldly wisdom or of material sciences. One may be ignorant of all these, yet aware of his true nature which is the real wisdom. Whereas another may have known many sciences yet be ignorant of what he really is. The latter wisdom leads to material welfare and the former to spiritual emancipation, which is everlasting and endowing peace.

Here we face some knotty questions. Whose is this ignorance? Whence does it come? How can the effulgent One, the Ãtman, be covered by this ignorance? Is not then Maya more powerful than the Ãtman? Let us take these questions one by one. The ignorance, says the Vedantist, is of two types, one is the primaeval Mãyã having recourse to which Iswara projects this world; and the other, which controlling jiva binds him to the world. So there is Mãyã in Iswara, which is His own power, and ignorance in the jiva. This ignorance is therefore of the jiva. We now come to the second question: From where does this ignorance come if the Atman is self-effulgent consciousness or Knowledge Absolute? The Vedantist's proposition that appeals to reason is: that this ignorance is without beginning. Or as Swamiji says: 'Truth never dreams . . . Illusion arises from illusion alone.' No satisfactory answer can be obtained to this question so long as one is in the realm of Mãyã. This is true not only of Mãyã but of the world as well, which again according to the Vedantist is nothing but Mãyã. One does not know wherefrom this universe came into being and in what it is sustained. This statement may seem absurd to many, as so much has been discovered about it by the scientists. But we forget that science deals only with things which have already come into being, of perceivable objects, or to tell it briefly, objects which come under the purview of the senses. They cannot say what was there before creation, may be billions of years ago. Yet again scientists cannot think of a time when there was no creation. That is, they work in time, in space and in terms of causality. When they can go beyond these then only can they come to know from whence this creation came into being. Swami Vivekananda pertinently and categorically sets down, 'No amount of knowledge of the external world could solve the problem (of the mystery of the universe). "But," says the scientist, "we are just beginning to know a little. Wait a few thousand years and we shall get the solution." "No," says the Vedantist, for he has proved beyond all doubt that the mind is limited, that it cannot go beyond certain limits —beyond time, space and causation. As no man can jump out of his own self, so no man can go beyond the limits that have been put upon him by the laws of time and space. Every attempt to solve the laws

of causation, time and space, would be futile because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three.' These modes of thought according to time, space and causation is what the Vedantin calls Mãyã.

Sri Ramakrishna on Mãyã

Sri Ramakrishna in his inimitable simple way described Mãyã as 'lust and lucre'. Let us see how far this statement goes along with the traditional view of Mãyã and how far it agrees in the practical field of life. The Vedantist says that Mãyã binds the jiva to the world, and that is exactly the work of lust — lust for power, for enjoyment and for wealth. That this is so has been proved over and over again. That is why all teachers of mankind enjoined upon a true spiritual aspirant to renounce these, if he wanted release from this bondage. Analyse the motives behind any action of any individual placed anywhere in the world. Is there anyone, — except, of course, those who have gone beyond worldly attachment — whose motive cannot be classified under these divisions. If we probe into the motive of an individual who murders, robs or cheats, or a nation which trespasses, overrides or overruns its neighbouring states we will surely find that it falls under one of these categories. Religion, however, is not in exercising our power to enjoy but to overcome the strong urge to do so. This simple definition of Sri Ramakrishna is so apt, and at the same time so completely clears the cobwebs of confusion that had gathered round this word Mãyã that it looks too simple to be true. But as Swamiji remarks, 'Truths of life are most simple,' but we cannot understand them at once because of their simplicity. Again, this definition does not contradict in the least the Vedantic meaning of Mãyã, viz. power to veil the real and present the unreal as the real. For is it not infatuation of the unreal that drags man into the whirlpool of this world? This will be clear if we quote Sri Ramakrishna again where he says, 'Attachment to one's relatives is Mãyã.' The whole world knows how powerful this pull is.

Swami Vivekananda on Maya

Swamiji further illustrates this same idea of Sri Ramakrishna when he says, 'Mãyã is a simple statement of facts — what we are and what we see around us.' He does not merely peremptorily remark and ask us to believe or leave the rest to our imagination. He substantiates this statement with illustrations. He takes the tremendous fact of death and remarks: 'The whole world is going towards death; everything dies. All our progress, our vanities, our reforms, our luxuries, our wealth, our knowledge, have that one end — death. That is all that is certain. Cities come and go, empires rise and fall, planets break into pieces and crumble into dust, to be blown about by the atmospheres of other planets. Thus it has been going on from time without beginning. Death is the end of everything. Death is the end of life, of beauty, of wealth, of power, of virtue, too. Saints die and sinners die, kings die and beggars die. They are all going to death, and yet this tremendous clinging on to life exists. Somehow, we do not know why, we cling to life; we cannot give it up. And this is Mãyã.' Further he points out how, 'the least amount of material prosperity that we enjoy is elsewhere causing the same amount of misery.'

Swamiji then goes on to depict forcefully the fact of the universe: How though like a seesaw, alternating between misery and happiness, it enchants man and holds him down in its grip. 'This,' he says, 'is Mãyã.' For a bit of happiness a load of misery is suffered

patiently. Nature makes us work like an ox attached to the grinding mill. With a wisp of straw dangling in front and attached to the yoke the ox is tempted and it moves on and on but never reaches the coveted straw. So too are we employed to plough the nature's fields and grind the nature's mill and still think that we will one day overcome this nature. This is Mãyã.

Another fallacious argument which man is always prone to is: that he is progressing towards good, and that a time will come when it will be all good and no evil. If that were so, why are there an increasing number of law-courts and ever increasing number of law-suits? Why are there so many police posses, so many anti-corruption squads, and then again the security police, the plain-clothes men and so on? Is this .the sign of lessening of evil? No doubt, man of the present age compared with the man of the forest has considerably improved towards good, as also in his power to do good. But from the above it is also clear that in that very proportion evil too has increased. Still we do not believe it and this is Mãyã.

This world is a place of contradictions. It is at best Tantalus's hell, and yet we do not recognise it as such, for when we know it we would like to get out of it. We cannot add a drop more to the happiness of the world without adding misery to it in the same proportion. We may be asked here whether it is wrong to do good. No one will say that. But we have to remember that all this doing good is only for one's own edification. We must do good, for that is the way to avoid evil; only let us not do so with the idea that we will be able to wipe out all the misery from this world. For as Swami Vivekananda says, 'It is like chronic rheumatism. Drive it out from the legs, it will go to the head.' We have thus seen, how Swamiji's idea on Mãyã, far from being contradictory to his Master's, explains it more fully and therefore is at the same time in no way a deviation from the traditional meaning. He has only cleared the labyrinth and put it in plain language so that even an ordinary man, not brought up in the tradition, can also understand and assimilate it.

Is Mãyã endless?

When the Vedantist says that Mãyã is without beginning, does it not, as a natural corollary, follow that it will have no end? Vedanta does not leave these doubts in the lurk: It says, 'No, Mãyã can be ended.' This position of Vedanta will be clear when we discuss the nature of Mãyã. For the present let us accept it as a working hypothesis. If this statement of Vedanta is accepted then liberation which is the goal of human life becomes an assured fact. Mãyã ceases to have influence on the individual when he sees himself in his own true form, that of Sat-Cit-Ananda. And this seeing is liberation according to any known concept, though a little modified here or mended there in conformity with the individuals' leanings. What if we maintain that Mãyã being without beginning must also be endless? Then there is no point in striving for liberation: in that case the individual soul cannot go beyond Mãyã, which is the criterion of liberation.

How does Mãyã or Ignorance cover the Self-Effulgent Ãtman?

This brings us to the third question: If the Ãtman is said to be Knowledge Absolute how can ignorance cloud it? We shall answer this by a familiar example. Let us take the sun, which is a luminous body. It is obscured by the presence of clouds in the atmosphere

and according as the density of the clouds is thick or thin the sun is partially seen or totally unseen. It may be, we may not be able to see it for days together. How do we account for it? The clouds are after all not so vast as the sun, yet they do cover it in a particular area. It may be here objected, that the simile is out of place and not a proper comparison, on the ground that the sun is far away and the clouds are very near compared to the distance of the sun whereas it is not the case with the Ãtman. The Ãtman is one's own being. Yes, says the Vedantist, though it is near it appears very far being tainted by the clouds of attachment to things, like the body, other than the Ãtman. That is why the Upanisads say, 'It is far; It is the inmost; It is inside everything as well as outside of all these.' [3] So it is not a fancy nor a groundless, parallelless argument to say that ignorance clouds the self-effulgent One. Now, when the above answers have been thoroughly grasped, it is easy to know what to expect for the fourth one. If Mãyã or ignorance can be ended, how can it be more powerful than the Ãtman? We have let ourselves be tarnished and are weeping, or as Swamiji says: 'We put our hands before our eyes and weep that it is dark. Take the hands away and there is light; the light exists always for us, the self-effulgent nature of the human soul.'

Mãyã as Name and Form

We spoke of Mãyã as ignorance. What is meant by this is explained by an Upanisadic passage. 'All the forms and names are only play of words, the clay (the substance) alone is real.' [4] Our ignorance is about this substance. We take the name and form to be real. And this is what deludes us. The Upanisad gives us three instances: of clay, of gold and of iron. The Upanisad says that whatever the forms that a substance has been changed into or by whatever the names they are called, they have no existence apart from the substance. Pots, pans and pitchers which are made of clay can have no existence except in and through clay, the substance. The necklaces, bangles and rings of gold can have no existence separate from gold. 'We can never see name, form or causes standing by themselves. This phenomenon is Mãyã,' says Swamiji. As it is in the world of matter so also it is with the universe — whether man, beast, sun, moon or stars, it is all name and form while the true substance is only One. When the names and forms are destroyed what remains is only that Eternal Spirit, Ãtman, Brahman. This name and form brings in duality and thus creates delusion. It is the ignorance of the substance, of which the universe is only a distorted vision, that brings in all delusion. Now the question is how does the infinite Spirit become finite. We dealt with this question earlier in a different context but it bears repetition here. Vedanta says this duality is only an appearance, in reality it is Non-dual.[5] When we look through Mãyã, through time, space and causation, the Infinite appears to have become the finite. And as long as one remains in this field of time and space one cannot but see many and be deluded. This is a statement of fact and we see how beautifully Swamiji's definition of Mãyã, as a statement of facts, fits in here.

Again, for all practical purposes we see nature acting. It produces the day and the night, the greenery and the desert, the turmoils in man's mind and the upheavals in the galaxies. This is a tremendous force and we feel the impact of it every day of our life. Yet, says the Vedantist, the way for liberation, freedom is not with nature but against it. Our very life is a fight against nature. Swamiji observes: 'We are not born as helpers of nature, but competitors with nature. We are its bond-masters, but we bind ourselves down. Why is this house here? Nature did not build it. Nature says go and live in the forest. Man says I will build a house and fight with nature, and he does so. The whole history of humanity is a

continuous fight against the so-called laws of nature, and man gains in the end.' This is so even in the internal world. 'Man,' continues Swamiji, 'as it were, cuts his way out of nature to freedom.' This nature, which is a statement of facts has been described in Vedanta as Mãyã. Now we see that it matters little by what name it is called, ignorance, nature or Mãyã, the power is the same. We are in it; we do not know how we came into it but we live in it. All our thinking and all our action are in it.

Nature of Mãyã

What is the nature of this Mãyã which is so powerful a force? And what is the way out of it? Mãyã, also called *avyakta* is the Lord's power. It is without beginning; is made up of the three *gunas* — sattva, rajas and tamas, and is superior to the effects. It can be inferred by the wise only by the effect it produces. And it is this Mãyã that projects the world, says Sri Sankara in his *Vivekachudamani*. [6] Continuing he describes its nature thus: 'It is neither existent nor non-existent nor of the characteristic of both.' [7] It is not existent as it can be destroyed by the Knowledge of Brahman, just as the rope in the snake seen in the dark is no more existent when light flashes upon it and the rope becomes known. It is not non-existent because it projects all the differences, and can be inferred from the effects it produces. It cannot be of both characteristics because such a thing is an incongruity. By the play of its *gunas* Mãyã throws a veil, as it were, on the Real substance and apparently distorts It to look like divergent things. There is a beautiful parable of Sri Ramakrishna which explains the nature of Mãyã: 'A priest was once going to the village of a disciple of his. He had no servant with him. Seeing a cobbler on the way, he asked him to accompany him. The cobbler hesitated thinking that he would be a misfit, but the priest assured him that no one will know about his identity if he but kept silent. The cobbler agreed. At twilight, while the priest was sitting at prayers in the house of his disciple, another brahmana came and asked the priest's servant, to bring his shoes. True to the behest of his master, he made no response though the brahmana repeated his orders. At last, getting annoyed, the brahmana angrily said: "Sirrah, why don't you speak? Are you indeed a cobbler?" The cobbler hearing this, began to tremble with fear, and looking piteously at the priest, said: "O, venerable sir, I am found out. I dare not stay here any longer." So saying he took to his heels. Just so, as soon as Mãyã is recognized, she flies away.'

Mãyã is powerful no doubt but it can be overcome, says the Vedantist, by those who take recourse to Brahman. Sri Krishna says in the Gitã, 'This My divine Mãyã composed of the gunas is very difficult to be crossed. Those who take refuge in Me alone can go beyond it.' [8] Christ too said the same thing, 'Come unto Me, ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' Mãyã, therefore, can be transcended only by realizing the Lord, or Brahman, the true Reality. Until then whatever we may think or do we are still in Mãyã and simple denying it would not help matters.

---

[1] Quoted from the Soviet Weekly, August 1, 1963. Published from 3, Rosary Gardens, London, S.W.7.
[2] Svetasvataropanishad, 4.10.
[3] Isa Up. 5.
[4] Chandogya, 6.1.4.
[5] Mandukyakarika, 1.17.
[6] Verse 108.
[7] Ibid., 109.

[8] B. Gita, 7.14.

SCRIPTURES AND THEIR PURPOSE (*)

By Swami Paratparananda

* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – December 1963; Vol. 50; page 455

In an age when literature of every kind has grown enormously and is being read throughout the world, the part books play in the formulation of man's ideas and ideals is not difficult of comprehension. Yet when it comes to the question of religious books there has been a sort of hesitation and an injudicious assessment of their value among the intelligentsia, specially during the last few centuries. Perhaps, hesitation is reasonable, even doubting is permissible but outright condemnation of all that is religious as superstition and sophism is something that is perplexing; it shows an attitude of intolerance and self-righteousness. A position that is not enviable. For are these not the very modes of thinking they impute — we do not know with what measure of justification — to the religious man? But these things apart, it should be obvious to anyone now that religion, in spite of all the forces working against it, has come to stay. And true religion can never be annihilated however much other forces may try. For religion is Truth and Truth can never be destroyed. Religion as Swamiji has often stated is not in mere dogmas or creeds but in God-realization, in the realization of the Spirit. And as Sri Ramakrishna posited from his own experience, God is but one by whatever name He may be called and by whatever way He may be approached.

Relation between Scriptures and Religion

There is a very intimate relationship between the scriptures and religion. For the scriptures are nothing but the records of the intuitive experiences of the sages. They have been verified in the lives of saints and prophets and they are verifiable even today by those who earnestly and intently seek to find Truth. They are as the travel guides in the chartless ocean of spirituality. They are the compass, the sextant, the rudder, the sounding line, the barometer and the charts of an aspirant's ship in the religious sea. That is why some of the religions which had no scriptures, no books, quickly dwindled out of sight. When there is no authentic document people are likely to interpret and twist the utterances according to the individuals' tastes and pass them off as real stuff so that there remains nothing in them of the original, in content. It becomes a mass of superstition, fabulous, with the grain of truth miserably lost in the mudheap as it were. Within a short time everything gets coloured by interests and tendencies of individuals. This happens sometimes even in the case of the written sayings, what then to speak of those which were handed down by word of mouth. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, 'This eternal yoga, O Arjuna, I taught to Vivaswan and Vivaswan taught it to Manu. Manu taught it to Ikshvaku. Thus traditionally handed down it was known among the Rajarshis. But by the passage of time this yoga was lost in this world.'[1] It is to counteract this tendency to corruption and loss that the scriptures are necessary.

A doubt may now be raised whether or not the Vedas, which were presumed to have been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, had undergone such mutation. We have several reasons to believe it has not, chief of them being the reverence with which they were held. It made them sacrosanct. Tampering with them was considered blasphemous. Besides, these truths were tested by later saints and sages. If therefore anyone says to the Hindu that what is told in any particular scripture alone is correct and that it is beyond any man's capacity to verify those teachings, the Hindu forthwith gives up that man.

For he was taught differently. He was told that given the urge, intensity, time and attention needed for realization, the teachings could be verified and that every one of us could grow into a Rishi and sense those teachings as the Rishis of old did. To become a Rishi is the only way to liberation says Swamiji and he adds, until one becomes a Rishi one has not become religious. So we see that irrespective of the age in which these eternal truths were discovered, they must be open to probation, testing in every other age, nay at all times.

The Hindu Scriptures

Now among the scriptures of the Hindus the Vedas occupy a supreme position. They are variously called as Sabda, Sruti etc. That which was first uttered was Sabda (the word or the sound). That which was first heard by sages in the depths of meditation, and in the profundity of their being was Sruti. There is another class of books, which are called Smrtis — that which was remembered or the traditional law. These latter were composed later to govern society for a particular period. The latter have changed as changes in society occurred. The former contain the eternal truths and these truths never change. That is why the Vedas are said to be without beginning or end. One beauty of the Vedas is that you find in them all the ideas of religion — beginning from God in the far beyond, God as omnipresent and omniscient upto the unity between the creature and the Creator. This has, of course, led to the formulation of several sects, each contending what is to its liking in the Vedas as the important part, and others as secondary. But as Swamiji points out, 'Each is but a different stage in the journey, the aim of which is the perfect conception of the Vedas.' The Rishis of the Vedas were fearless, so they did not do away with the lower ideas as they came into possession of the higher revelations. They preserved these lower truths so that others who were to come after them may not be bewildered at the heights to which they had reached, but come up by stages. Most of the people in the world, at any given time, will be like babies as far as spirituality is concerned. They require to be taken step by step. Hence even at the risk of being accused of confusing the issue, they let these lower truths be. These several statements of the Vedas may appear to the lay man as perplexing but the sages were sure that others like them would be born to show a way out of this maze of ideas. Perhaps in their own times they had no difficulty in dispelling the doubts and confusion that might have arisen in the minds of their contemporaries. Although the scriptures describe a variety of things they chiefly speak of one thing — of God and of the means to attain Him. May be there are some seemingly conflicting ideas about Him. But they are not sustained when put under the microscopic test of profound intuition. This in brief is the content of the scriptures.

How to reconcile the so-called contradictions in the Vedas

The apparent contradictions in the Vedas have to some extent puzzled seekers. This doubting, this feeling at sea, is not a new phenomenon. We meet with this type of doubt in the Upanisads too. When Svetaketu was asked by his father, 'Have you known that One by which everything else is known,' he was genuinely perturbed. He had never heard of such a thing before. He protests and asks to be satisfied. However, the father leads him slowly, by examples and experimentations, to the highest Truth. To know about the Highest even intellectually is a difficult task. For there we find all contradictions meeting. Let us take an instance from the discussion between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi. Yajnavalkya while explaining how the individual jiva, after shedding its *upadhis*, incrustations, gets merged in Brahman, like the lump of salt thrown into the water and cannot be separated from It, says: 'After attaining oneness, my dear, there is no more consciousness.'[2] This perplexes Maitreyi. She seems to think, 'How can this be? He has first said that Brahman is Pure Intelligence.

Now he says after attaining oneness there is no more consciousness.[3] Why does he talk in this conflicting language?' She asks Yajnavalkya, 'Sir, just here you have thrown me into confusion by saying that after attaining oneness the self has no more consciousness.' Yajnavalkya then expounds to her that the self that had attained oneness with Brahman loses the 'particular consciousness' superimposed on the self due to its identifying itself with the body, mind and the like and not the Cosmic Consciousness. And when thus explained only Maitreyi's doubt was cleared.

A similar doubt is being raised by Arjuna in a different context. When Sri Krishna urged Arjuna to fight the battle of Kurukshetra in support of the righteous cause, and simultaneously talked highly of renunciation, the latter got confounded. Arjuna asked: 'By apparently contradictory words, it seems as if you are confusing my understanding. Please tell me that one path by which I can attain the good.'[4] Sri Krishna in reply says that there are two paths and these are for two different types of people. He further adds that one cannot practise renunciation unless one had rid oneself of all desires. So that was not the path for him. Thus, we see that every great teacher had had to speak not only for one class of people but several, and therefore he had to say things which suited those particular types of persons. If these teachings are taken together, without the idea of the context in which they were uttered, it is natural that they appear to be opposing each other in content.

There is a beautiful story in the Upanisads which rightly illustrates this point. It shows how the same syllable conveys different meanings to diverse types of people: Once the three classes of sons of Prajapati — the gods, men and Asuras — lived a life of continence with Prajapati. After sometime the gods requested Prajapati to instruct them. Prajapati uttered the syllable "Da" and asked whether they had understood what he meant. They replied they had; that Prajapati was asking them to control themselves. After some time the men too having finished their period of probation begged to be instructed. To them also Prajapati said the word "Da" and asked whether they had understood. They too said, 'Yes, you ask us to give.' Lastly came the Asuras and to them too Prajapati repeated the same syllable "Da" and asked what they understood by it. The Asuras replied, 'You ask us to be kind.' To all of them Prajapati had said that they had rightly understood Him.[5] Does it not sound incoherent? No, a little explanation will prove it. In Sanskrit the words, control, give and be kind begin with the letter "da" viz. *damyata*, *datta*, and *dayadhwam*. Now the devas or the gods were too much given to enjoyment, men to hoarding and the Asuras to killing. By living a life of celibacy with Prajapati all these three had understood their own particular defects and when therefore Prajapati uttered the syllable "da" they knew what he wanted of them. The gods were to abstain from enjoyment, men were to give and the Asuras were enjoined to be kind and all this was conveyed by the utterance of that single syllable "da". Does this not show that the scriptures serve the purpose of all genuine seekers?

Similarly in the Vedas, which are meant for all, we find apparently contradictory ideas but suiting men of different tendencies. These contrary views are actually only visions of the same Reality from different angles, from varied heights. So, an earnest seeker has only to find out which path and which ideal appeal to his nature, suit his temperament most. But he has to see unity in the diversity. For diversity makes for creation and unity goes back to the source, makes for our own abode. Scriptures, therefore, do not confuse us but tell us everything and we get bewildered because we have not the acumen to grasp their import.

Purpose of the Scriptures

Having dealt with the content of the scriptures, it is not difficult to presume what their intention is. It has already been explained that they do not intend to confuse man. This should be always remembered. Secondly, their intention is to guide mankind on the path of

spirituality, to help man upward from whatever level of development he is. Like the scientist who does research with the data already in his possession, the aspirant with the help of the scriptures engages in research in the spiritual field. One can verify one's experience — the results of one's research in the laboratory of the spirit — with the conclusions already arrived at in the scriptures. They are like reference books, where we can compare notes. If one's experiences are not in compliance with the eternal truths one has missed one's way somewhere. But this does not happen when one is under the guidance of a competent teacher.

However, there is every chance of the principles of the scriptures being misinterpreted and misused if they fall into wrong hands. We shall cite an instance here to show how the theory of Karma was tortuously treated by glib talkers: When Swamiji was staying at Calcutta in 1897, a preacher belonging to a society for the protection of cows had an interview with him. When asked about the object of the society, the preacher said that it was to protect the old, decrepit and diseased cows from the slaughter house and provide infirmaries for them. Swamiji while commending their work asked the preacher what help his society — which had enough resources — had rendered to the people in central India, where due to famine nine lakhs of people had died. The preacher's nonchalant reply was that the famine had broken out as a result of men's Karma, their sins.

Can perversion of the principles go any further? Swamiji who was furious with indignation at such indifference of the preacher towards humanity, suppressing his feelings said that he had not the least sympathy with associations which did not feel for men even while they were dying of starvation. Let us beware of such misguided people who make a travesty of truth.

Extent of the usefulness of the Scriptures

As already stated the scriptures can help you, guide you but they cannot take you to the goal. Records of other peoples' realization cannot make you realize. You can tread their path, feel their way but you have to struggle for yourself to reach the goal. All effort is yours. The books cannot ferry you across the ocean of life. No one can do that. Even the teacher can only guide you. Sri Sankara referring to mere scriptural knowledge, in an exquisite couplet in Sanskrit, says: 'If the highest Truth is not known all study of the scriptures is in vain. When, however, the highest Truth is known then also the study of scriptures is futile'[6]. Does he then discourage Shastric studies? No one can make this allegation against Sankara. For we meet in his commentaries on the Upanisads very often, the statement, 'Atman is to be pursued vigorously through the teachings of the Shastras and the Guru.' What he purports to convey to us is that if the knowledge of the scriptures is not utilized, not put into practice, then that knowledge is acquired in vain. Again, once the Highest is realized all further study of scriptures is useless, for all of them are only as a means to attain the Highest, and not for their own sake. Once the purpose — the attainment of God — is fulfilled there remains nothing more to be gained.

Sri Ramakrishna deprecating too much of studies said, 'Suppose you have received a letter from your home asking you to buy certain things. And suppose you have mislaid it. If the contents of the letter are known to you, will you worry about the letter or try to collect the things stated therein?' Another time he exhorted one of his young disciples: 'What is there in the Vedanta that you study it so much. Is it not that "Brahman alone is real and all else illusory"? Work for its realization.'

Swamiji remarks in one place, 'Books cannot teach God, but they can destroy ignorance; their action is negative.' Even the Vedas cannot show you God, cannot make you realize your true self. 'By what can you know the knower,'[7] say the Upanisads. Your essential being is the self-luminous consciousness. What is required is to dispel the ignorance that has cloaked it. Remove the covering and you see the light. If we are in a dark room we

will have only to throw open the doors and windows to see the sun. We do not require another light to see the sun. He is self-luminous. When he rises we see him. Not only can we see him but we can also dispense with all other lights which we might have lighted to see other objects inside or outside our dwellings. And this Atman, or Brahman, which is the essence of every creature, nay everything that is in the universe, is the source of all light, even of the sun, moon, stars and all, say the Upanisads.[8]

Conclusion

Too much study of scriptures makes man vain-glorious. It leads him away from the goal. The goal of life is God-realization. All scriptures tell us that God alone is real and all other things are transient. They also show us the way to God. What we have to do after knowing the purpose of the scriptures is to work for its realization. Or as Sri Ramakrishna says, what is required is to dive deep down into ourselves and make our life fruitful by realization of our true nature, like the mythical pearl-oyster which after collecting the rain drop, when the star Svati is in the ascendant, dives down to the bottom of the sea to produce the beautiful pearl.

---

[1] Bhagavad Gita IV.1.2.
[2] Br. Up. II.iv.12.

[3] op.cit. 13
[4] Bhagavad Gita III.2.
[5] Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, V.ii.1-3.
[6] Vivekachudamani, 59.
[7] Br.Up. II.iv.14.
[8] Katha Up. V.15.

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA—THE SPIRITUAL SON OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – January 1964; Vol. 50; page 494

I

Every enterprise requires two distinctive forces to keep it in a palpable, healthy and dynamic condition — one to help it expand and the other to aid it in consolidation. Both these forces are imperative. For without depth expansion tends towards infirmity, and without expansion depth becomes meaningless. This is more poignantly felt in the case of an enterprise which seeks to serve the spiritual needs of mankind as a whole. That is what happened to Hinduism, the Eternal Religion, when it made foreign travel a taboo. The exchange of ideas ceased; the firmament of religion shrank, as it were, to such small dimensions that it was thought to be contained in the mere observance of certain external practices.

In the movement ushered in by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda played the dynamic part of spreading the message of the Master broadcast. He trotted the earth almost from end to end in order to do this. But the life given to him was very short, a bare 39 years, out of which his actual work can be said to begin only after 1886. If we remember the days of the Baranagore monastery we find Swami Vivekananda not as the dynamic interlocutor but as the consolidator. For after the passing away of the Master the young disciples had gone back to their homes and it was left to Swami Vivekananda to gather them back, instil the Master's fiery renunciation into them and pick up the thread from where the Master had left to ensconce the brotherhood on a firm footing. And once it was done, the Master called him, as it were, to function as the other arm, that of taking the message of the Eternal Religion to different parts of the world. For a time it appears, on the surface, that Swami Vivekananda had ceased to consolidate but even this appearance is for a brief span of time. Even from America he was urging his *gurubhais* and disciples to get a plot of land and to build a monastery, from where future preachers of Vedanta could spring up.

But his life, as we have said, was too brief and he had so much to do in making the world know about the Master's message. He, therefore, stuck to it and submitted to the commands from on High. Nevertheless he saw his approaching end. To whom should he entrust the Master's treasure — the sacred task of guiding the movement? The Master himself had solved this problem for Narendranath in the Dakshineswar days. Once Sri Ramakrishna had remarked, `Rakhal has in him the capacity to rule a kingdom.' Narendranath who was present on the occasion took the hint. He told the younger group of the Master's disciples about the Master's appreciation and said, `From today we shall call Rakhal, Raja ', and that epithet stuck on. Sri Ramakrishna who heard about it later, was

greatly pleased. Remembering the Master's words Swamiji from the very beginning left him in charge of the Math and formally made over to Rakhal, Swami Brahmananda, the Presidentship of the organization in 1901. For full twenty-one years he guided the faltering foot-steps of the young organization un-ostentatiously, yet commanding the respect, awe and love of one and all with whomsoever he came in contact.

After the going forth of the message of Sri Ramakrishna into the world, it was required that preachers fit to take up the mantle were to be recruited and trained, not for a few years but for generations to come. It was a work which required infinite patience. It was the task of consolidation of what was already gained. And this task devolved on the shoulders of Swami Brahmananda, and before two years had elapsed he lost his companion, Swami Vivekananda.

II

It is difficult to assess the personality of the spiritually great ones. It is more so when the person happens to be of a silent disposition. So, to get a peep into the personality of Swami Brahmananda we have to take recourse to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master has left to us, through his talks, his insight into the exalted characteristics of his disciples, their inherent natures and their unapproachable heights of renunciation. `Once, before Rakhal came,' says Sri Ramakrishna, 'I saw in a vision that the Divine Mother suddenly brought a boy, and placing him on my lap said, "He is your son". I was startled to hear it. I said, "What is that? How can I have a son?" -She smiled and explained, "He is not a son in the ordinary worldly sense of the term, but your all-renouncing spiritual son." Thus assured, I was consoled. Rakhal came sometime after I had that vision and I recognized him at once as the boy.' Another time Sri Ramakrishna stated how Rakhal's nature was revealed to him: `One day just before Rakhal came here I saw in a trance Krishna, as the shepherd boy of Vrindavana, standing on a full-blown lotus in the midst of a lake and by his side stood a boy looking at Him playfully. When Rakhal came, I knew him as that boy, as Krishna's companion.' Rakhal was therefore not only the companion of the Master in this Incarnation but in the past as well. The Incarnations come with such pure souls to help them in their divine mission.

Again, Sri Ramakrishna used to class him as an Ìswarakoti — one possessed of divine qualities, perfect from his very birth—and also as one of the inner circle (*antaranga*). `Youngsters like him belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with God-consciousness. No sooner do they grow a little older than they realize the danger of coming in contact with the world.... Their one thought is how to realize God,' said the Master many a time. These words of the Master are very significant. For Sri Ramakrishna did not heap any undue praise on anyone for whatsoever a reason. He was simple as a child and whatever was revealed to his insight he spoke without reservation. Moreover, he depended on the Divine Mother for everything, even to bring to him versatile spiritual geniuses, which the Mother had said would come to him. He prayed to Her and cried in anguish at the delay in their coming but there he rested. All his appeals were to the Divine Mother and he was sure that She would not fail him. She did not let him down at any time. That is the reason why his estimation is infallible, his every word in-estimable.

Now, the relation between Sri Ramakrishna and Rakhal was sweet, intimate and very touching. His attitude towards this disciple was like that of a mother to her child. Rakhal too in his presence was just like a child of five or six, wholly dependent on him and

basking as it were, under his protecting wings.

Such had been the personality of Swami Brahmananda even at the beginning of his spiritual career. It deepened and expanded with the passage of time. For the first few years after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna he spent his time exclusively in tapasya at Puri, Banaras, Vrindavan, and on the banks of the Narmada. Knowing his in-drawn nature and complete reticence to pay heed to the wants of the body Swamiji enjoined one of his brother disciples to accompany him and look after his needs. Swami Subodhananda, another direct disciple of the Master, who lived with him at Vrindavan used to bring him food and set it down in an appointed place, but many days it would remain untouched, for Maharaj, as Rakhal was lovingly called, would be lost to the outer world, in the contemplation of the divine.

At Banaras when he was offered help in the way of arrangement for his food as long as he stayed there, he politely but firmly declined the offer and preferred to live on the food begged from the alms-houses. For it entailed no obligation on him. Besides, it left him free from disturbance by way of people crowding in. This was the time when he desired to be left alone. From Banaras he proceeded to the banks of the Narmada. It is said that here, once, for six days at a stretch he had no consciousness of the outer world at all. So deep was his samadhi. But what divine experiences and visions he had during these times were never known. They remained a sealed book for ever as he never talked about them. Once, however, he remarked, `The religious life begins after Nirvikalpa samadhi '. But how few can understand it! Till one attains that state one sees everything in a different way, one's evaluation of things gets coloured by one's own nature. The ideal is very high and hence appears impossible. But persons like him who have attained the goal have affirmed it. Swamiji too said, `Religion is realization '. Until then we are all groping in the dark.

III

Swami Brahmananda's contribution to the world is enormous but the brightest part of it is his life — austerely undertaken, unostentatiously but immaculately lived and above all purely dependent upon God. It is an absorbing study to follow his footsteps as a pilgrim from Banaras to Narmada, from thence to Panchavati, Dwaraka, and other places. His absolute dependence on God and stern abidance by the rule of non-acceptance of money is a thing that fills one with awe and more so in a world where everything seems to go topsy turvy in the absence of that one thing — money. His dependence on God was pure and simple, almost child-like. At Bombay a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna pressed him to accept his hospitality but he refused on the ground that it would interfere with his solitude and flag away his dependence on God. He put up in a quiet place near Mumbadevi's temple and lived on alms. Even for travel he would not accept money. Many places he covered on foot despite the untold difficulties.

During this time, in Vrindavan, he came across Vijay Krishna Goswami whom he knew at Dakshineswar. Both were glad at the meeting. The Goswamiji, who had come to know of the austere life being led by Swami Brahmananda, asked him: `Sir, why are you engaged in such austere practices when Sri Ramakrishna had already bestowed on you all types of experiences and visions?' In a sweet voice, the Swami replied, `What I have experienced by his grace I am trying to make my own.' The Goswami was wonderstruck. He felt the surge of the God-hunger that was passing through the Swami and thought it futile to try to dissuade him from his pursuit. From Vrindavan he went to Hardwar to

continue his life of contemplation. Thus it was a saga of intense sadhana for a long period until, perhaps, he received some command from Sri Ramakrishna to return to the field of work. For just when he was passing his days blissfully at Vrindavan he suddenly left for Calcutta. After a few days of his arrival there he said to some of his brother disciples: `I was blissful at Vrindavan. But I came here so that I may be of service to the brothers at the Math to help them express in their lives that love and devotion which we found in Sri Ramakrishna, so that people who would come in contact with them may be reminded of him.' Further he added, `People will come to you, will come to the Math seeking solace. They will take shelter at Sri Ramakrishna's feet and attain peace from the miseries of this world.'

It must be remembered, however, that we cannot expect always something spectacular to happen in the life of a man of the spirit. The contribution of these spiritual ones go, more often than not, unnoticed. For their influence like the morning dew that brings into blossom myriads of flowers is silently but unobtrusively exerted. It cannot be measured in terms of worldly things. A single moment's contact with them, a single word of theirs changes some men, gives others supreme consolation. It is unwise, therefore, to judge these great ones from mere outward accomplishments. People competent to know about them are those who have attained similar spiritual heights. In this connection it would be profitable to know what Swamiji once said of him: `Raja is the greatest treasure house of spirituality.' On another occasion when a European devotee came to Swamiji with his spiritual problems Swamiji sent him to Swami Brahmananda with the words: ` There is a dynamo working and we are all under him.' The devotee after conversing with Swami Brahmananda felt his doubts cleared and ex-pressed gratitude for the help. Such was his personality.

The tree is known by its fruits. But seldom is it known how the seed grew from its tiny, inconspicuous beginning into the tree. The Ramakrishna Order has today expanded into a fairly big institution and has immense possibilities of further growth in it. But it was Maharaj who sowed the seed, watered and manured it with all motherly care in order that it may shoot up into a mighty banyan tree, so that the message of Sri Ramakrishna could reach and minister to the spiritual as also the secular needs of humanity for ever. Maharaj, it is needless to say, firmly believed like Swamiji that humanity needed the message of Sri Ramakrishna particularly at the present moment of its evolution. So in order to put the organization on a firm footing, Maharaj, who was far-sighted in administration, picked and chose the right type of human instruments, monks and lay devotees, for particular fields of work both in India and abroad. That is why the success the disciples, lay or monastic, achieved everywhere was almost phenomenal.

IV

From the time Swami Brahmananda, who carne to be known to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna as `Maharaj ', arrived at Calcutta, after his long pilgrimage, a different phase opened in his life — that of ministering to the spiritual needs of the people. Sri Ramakrishna's name had by then spread far and wide and many earnest seekers, young and old, now thirsted to drink of the ambrosia of his message. But Sri Ramakrishna was not living in his physical tenement any longer. People had also heard a great deal about Maharaj; how he was the beloved of the Master and so on; so they, from all walks of life, young and old, students and the employed came to him whenever he stayed in Calcutta.

The ease with which he moved with them made them shed the awe, that otherwise naturally awakened in them on seeing him, and find in him a person almost of their own age. They felt free to unburden their innermost thoughts and problems to him as if he was their life long confidant. And he with his command over the spiritual kingdom ministered to their needs.

But it was not always that he talked about spiritual matters. With many he discussed things in which they were interested. We can only presume, now at this distance of time, that probably that was the way by which he drew them toward himself and through that process got them interested in the life spiritual. For who can hold long their own once they come in touch with the divine? His close and long association with and training under his Master had revealed to him the intricacies of human nature, and this knowledge he utilized in imparting instructions suited to each individual. Many young men soon began to come and it was left to him to train them and cast them in the mould of Sri Ramakrishna. This spiritual ministry thus begun continued throughout the rest of his life.

V

After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda the full responsibility of guiding the mission fell upon him. We have said that he used to remain indrawn most of the time, but it was also true that he was aware of what went on throughout the organization. Though in the beginning there were a few centres, gradually the work of the Order expanded. More centres sprang up but his vigilant eye was on every activity of the mission, without any one being aware of it. He never interfered with the normal working of any centre but everyone looked to him for his blessings on any new venture. He even knew the progress each one of the members of the order made and we have this on the authority of his own words: `Do you think,' said he to a disciple, ‘I don't know what you boys have been doing and how you have been faring in the path of God. I may live in one place and seem to be unconcerned, but I know what is happening to each of you.'

Many a time his mere presence would solve the knottiest of problems that arose in a centre and that without his having the necessity to enquire into them. For in his presence the minds of the aspirants were lifted far above the mundane plane and the petty squabbles that they might have indulged in appeared to them as childish and unbecoming of them. Thus before him all problems melted like snow before the sun.

`Once when he was asked,' writes a disciple, `to make some new rules for the guidance of the young monks he replied: "Swamiji has already made our rules for us. We do not need to add any new ones. Add more love, attain more devotion and help others to move toward the ideal of God." ' That was his prescription. For had he not seen how Sri Ramakrishna without formally inaugurating any organization knitted them, young boys, indissolubly together? That bond was more firm than all the rules could induce to hold together. He saw that love destroyed hatred and jealousies. Devotion lifted man from the animal-level to the godly state, and naturally in that state men could do with few rules. If one could really be devoted to God how could he hate His creatures?

And how to add this love? Unless one loved God intensely one cannot truly love His creatures. All other love is either a trading as Swamiji put it —you do me something and in return I cherish you some affection — or a make-believe. And loving God is not an easy matter. Unless one sees God one cannot love Him truly and wholly. So Maharaj laid great stress on practice of the spiritual disciplines to attain God-realization, to see God.

`Onward, forward ' was his watchword to one and all. Practice of spiritual disciplines was his remedy for all types of drawbacks, moral as well as spiritual. For he said that this would clear one's perspective, purify one's mind and make one see light where one saw darkness before. Spiritual disciplines properly practised made one humble.

Someone once asked, `Maharaj, I am not getting concentration of mind. I do not feel that I am making any progress spiritually.' He replied: `Practise spiritual disciplines regularly for eight or nine years and then you will reap the fruits of your efforts. Even in a year you will make some progress.' Thus with assurances and encouragements he guided the disciples on the path of the Spirit. But when in spite of his efforts if a disciple failed to make progress, Maharaj helped him to clear the hurdles. Yet he laid great stress on individual effort.

One thing he warned against was about indulging in idle talk. He said, `Idle talk wastes much energy.' A spiritual aspirant is to be up and doing. His thoughts should be constantly dwelling on God. The Upanisads say, `Know Him alone, give up all vain talk.'[1] For, once the mind is allowed to run where it pleases it will be difficult to gather it again. In the Kathopanisad there is a beautiful allegory where the Self is likened to the owner, body to the chariot, the discriminating intellect to the charioteer, the mind to the reins, the senses to the horses and the sense objects to the roads.[2] Then it goes on to say, `One whose intellect is dull and undiscriminating and one who is always of uncontrolled mind, his senses are uncontrolled like the wicked horses of a charioteer.'[3] They bring the chariot and the owner to grief. Maharaj says, Give your mind to the world and it will destroy not only your mind and soul but the body too. On the other hand give it to God and it will contribute not only to the well-being of the mind but of the body also.' Sri Ramakrishna too warns us: `The mind is like a packet of mustard seeds — once spilled it is very difficult to collect them again.' Hence we must always be circumspect of what we think, of what we talk and what we do.

Swami Brahmananda was a tower of strength to the organization. Under his fostering care it was nurtured during its early days almost from its inception. So when we shall be celebrating his hundred and second birthday—he was only a few days younger to Swamiji—this month it is but meet we look back and think over this divine personality who came into the world to transmit the message of the Incarnation of the age, Sri Ramakrishna, and imbibe some inspiration to carry us onward on the path of God.

---

[1] Mundaka Up. 2.2.5.
[2] Kathopanishad III. 3 and 4.
[3] Ibid., 5.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE PRACTICAL MYSTIC

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – February 1964; Vol. 50; page 550

The nineteenth century was a period full of upheavals all over the world. It was so in Europe, in which the Industrial Revolution set things apace and changed man's mode of living as well as ways of thinking. It was in the last century again that Charles Darwin by his theory of biological evolution threw a challenge to religion. It was also in the nineteenth century that there was a civil war in the new continent, that of America, that made the United States a fact of history. It was during that period again that a scramble for overseas empires began and India came to be more and more dominated by the British. The British, however, not confining themselves to political domination ventured to penetrate into the cultural field of Indian life, with their very subtle methods. The British posed as benefactors of the Indian people and wanted to civilize a backward race—as they presented the Indian people to the world. Indians were told, that their religion was crude, that their scriptures were mere superstitions and that deliverance lay in giving them up and following Western modes of thought and life.

But yet another upheaval more powerful, more lasting, greater in extension and richer in content, in answer to many of these little tumults, also came about in the last century, viz. the spiritual upheaval. It was ushered in by Sri Ramakrishna, born in a village, acting as a temple priest at Dakshineswar, not far from Calcutta, with very little of the so-called education but deeply rooted in the culture of the soul. His life was a fitting reply, a challenge to the clamours of the iconoclasts, to the agnostic and the atheist, to the doubter of the efficacy of Hindu religion to stand its ground against other religions and last but not least to the onslaught of the then scientific man on religion itself. Forces of religion were rallied round, as it were, to encounter the rising tide of agnosticism in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna's was a wonderful life. He began with a simple faith in God that was nurtured in the innocence of a village life, guarded in a home of pious parents, and enthralled in the legacy native to his being. As he pursued his spiritual practices he no doubt passed through dismal nights of doubt, but only to be firmly and indissolubly bound to the Divine Mother, by the blessing of Her vision—an experience that made him cling to Her, like a child to its mother, all his life. Her first vision brought on him a raging fever, as it were, to have her complete and uninterrupted presence. He pined and writhed in pain at separation from Her. In his anguish he rubbed his face on the rugged ground till it bled; so acute was his sorrow, so intense was his despair. He strained every nerve for that and completely gave his mind to Her. In this respect Sri Ramakrishna may be called a spiritual scientist. He, like the Rishis of old, was never content with theories but wanted to test them in the laboratory of practice and would not rest until he had gained his end. When he began

the worship of the Divine Mother in the temple of Dakshineswar, he asked himself this question: ‘Is the Divine Mother only a stone image?’ He thought he must verify it. He held a piece of cotton to the nostrils of the Image and strange to say he felt the breath of the Mother on it. He felt it more tangibly than he felt his own breath. That was the method of his experimentation. If the Divine Mother was a conscious entity She should be seen, should be realized—that was his firm determination. This determination was backed by a strong renunciation and a penetrative discrimination.

Even as a boy he had discovered by observation the futility of mere book-learning—a learning which could be only a means of earning livelihood and of no further use. It did not solve the problem of life, did not unfold its meaning. On the other hand his first mystic experience at the age of seven, at Kamarpukur, at the sight of white cranes flying across sombre clouds had bathed his soul in great bliss. Compared with it, he found all other joy only a semblance of it. His father's devotion to God, rich with dreams and visions, had helped the boy to concentrate his mind on Him. And his father's death, early though it was in his life to leave its full impress, still had left some void in the boy's heart. That the bo8y felt his mother's sorrow and ceased to tease her with his importunities after the death of his father gives evidence of this. His association with the wandering monks who visited the village of Kamarpukur kindled the fire of renunciation. Lastly, the religious performances of the wandering minstrels lit up his love of God. His power of concentration, specially on subjects connected with the God-head increased enormously, so much so that on occasions he was absorbed, completely oblivious of his surroundings, in the thoughts of the particular Deities, which the circumstances would arouse. His second ecstasy occurred on the way to the Temple of Visalakshi, the Divine Mother, of Anur, and his absorption in the thought of Siva on the Sivaratri, when he was called upon to act the part of Siva in the village drama, was his third mystic experience that lasted for a long time. Thus grounded in discrimination and renunciation and mind given to God, Sri Ramakrishna entered the state of adolescence well-equipped to start on his journey of mystical pursuit.

Before we proceed with our subject let us state what we understand by mystic experience in this context. It is not something that is mysterious or unravellable. It is not a thing of the past. It does not exhaust the human being. It is an experience of the supernatural. It is living beyond the senses. It can be experienced even now by those who live a pure and unsullied life and pursue the path of spirituality. It is the going to the source of all bliss. It is seeing God; being touched by Him. It is bliss of God or Atman bathing the soul. It is a state where all senses are left behind. Even speech cannot reach it. That is why it is not possible to describe it through the vehicle of language. Language is but a poor porter there. It is left far outside. It has no access to those chambers. This is what Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples. This is what we can see, if we care to, in his life. This is also what the Upanisads declare: ‘From whence speech unable to penetrate returns with the mind, reaching that bliss of Brahman a seer never fears anything.’ Reaching it man goes beyond all fear. He finds nothing else but himself or his God present everywhere. Normally, man in this world is afraid of several things and the worst fear of all is the fear of death—and these fears continue as long as he sees a second being other than himself. Even death of the physical body holds no fear to a person who has realized that he is deathless. Is this then not a significant benefit? Is it not a covetable experience? Mystic experience in brief, is something that can be felt by a human being, if there be the requisite qualities of purity and other disciplines to his credit. Sri Ramakrishna experienced this

mystic touch even in his first ecstasy in Kamarpukur. When all the household was perturbed at the sudden event and were trying to find remedy for the malady, the boy, Gadadhar, for so was Sri Ramakrishna named in his younger days, assured his parents that he did not feel anything bad, that, rather he felt a flow of bliss during the period of his unconsciousness. This was subsequently corroborated when nothing untoward happened to the boy.

Sri Ramakrishna's mystic experiences are innumerable to be enumerated here. But as far as is necessary to our subject we shall refer to some of them now and then. A spiritual person in India if anything is intensely practical, if not he is nothing. Speaking about practicality Swamiji once said to an audience in the West: 'Just as your people are practical in many things, so it seems our people are practical in this line (spirituality). Five persons in this country (America) will join their heads together and say, "We will have a joint stock company," and in five hours it is done; in India they could not do it in fifty years; they are so unpractical in matters like this. But, mark you, if a man starts a system of philosophy however wild its theory may be, it will have followers. For instance, a sect is started to teach that if a man stands on one leg for twelve years, day and night, he will get salvation—there will be hundreds ready to stand on one leg. All the suffering will be quietly borne. . . So you see the word practical is also relative.' So spirituality, religion and philosophy have a practical basis in India. And practice alone can bring one to fulfilment of one's ideal. This was obviously known to Sri Ramakrishna. So he plunged headlong into spiritual practices. Night and day he was absorbed in the thought of the Mother, at Dakshineswar. His only idea was to know and see Her. In the beginning he had none to guide him. But his own intense yearning brought on Her vision. He had heard that God never came to a person who was conscious of his ego, who looked upon himself as a man of noble birth, as a person of wealth and so on. Therefore, at dead of night, after every one had retired to bed, he would steal into the nearby Panchavati and casting off the sacred thread, the symbol of Brahmanhood, and even the wearing cloth, sit for meditation, deeply absorbed in the thought of God. His nephew and attendant Hriday noticed his absence from his room for several days.

One night wanting to know where Sri Ramakrishna went and what he did, Hriday followed him. But he felt scandalized when Sri Ramakrishna put off the sacred thread and the wearing cloth as well, as he sat in the woods for meditating. Hriday took him to task for his sacrilegious act. For a Brahmin to cast off the sacred thread! He could not think of it. But Sri Ramakrishna was unperturbed. He calmly replied, 'If a person wants to approach God, he should cast aside his sense of aristocracy of birth, wealth and the like and humble himself before God. For what are they before the omnipotent and omniscient Being? So I am trying to do that.' Another time Hriday tried to frighten his uncle out of the wood by throwing sand in the direction where he sat. But Sri Ramakrishna was lost to the outside world the moment he had entered the woods. So deep was his concentration. The fury of his hunger for God increased as days went by. He rolled on the ground calling, 'Mother,' 'Mother'. People around thought of him in various ways. Some thought him mad. Some others thought that he was crying out of colic pain. But to him, as he himself expressed later on to his disciples, the persons around were like pictures painted on a wall or at best were mere shadows.

Again, Sri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with a chance acquaintance with the Divine Mother. Perhaps, in spite of the bliss that he felt on his first vision, he had questioned himself, as Narendranath did later, whether it was not some fancy of his mind

that made him think that he had a vision of the Mother. Actually, however, the bliss itself had made him mad, as it were, for Her perpetual presence, as a lover longs for the presence of the beloved, as a child longs for the mother, and as a man of the world yearns for more and more wealth. And till he obtained the continuous vision of the Divine Mother and forced it, as it were, from Her, he was not contented. That was why he used to say: 'Who is my Mother! Is She a step-mother, no, She is my own Mother.' Yet other times he advised: 'Force your demand on God; claim your birthright as a son claims his patrimony.' To him God-vision is the birthright of every human being. We are the children of the Divine Mother. Why should She then withhold Her vision from us? We have every right to claim it. That was his firm conviction. Nay, it is his assurance to us from his life's own experience.

To him came the teachers of different faiths when he had known the Divine Mother, when he had conclusively established the relation of a child with Her; when he could see Her, and talk to Her whenever he desired to do so. In his case, to quote his own simile, the fruit came first and then the flower. His later sãdhanas were for the verification of what he had already known by his earnest faith and boundless yearning. His earlier realizations were corroborated when he followed the path laid down in the scriptures. After his first realization he came in contact with the God-head following other paths in a very short time. It did not take him more than three days to arrive at the culmination of any one path. Here also he was most practical. He put his whole mind, body and soul into it. For instance, when he was undergoing the disciplines of Islamic faith, he abstained from visiting the temples, everything about the Divine Mother was forgotten. In habits as well as costumes he followed the Mohammedans in every detail. And that is why he could arrive at the result in so short a time.

In the case of Advaitic sãdhana he had a little difficulty. While trying to concentrate his mind on the formless Brahman, the benign form of Divine Mother appeared before him everytime. He expressed his difficulty to Sri Totapuri, his teacher in the Advaitic sãdhana. The latter was not to be put away. He pressed a piece of broken glass between his eyebrows and asked him to concentrate his mind on that spot. No sooner did Sri Ramakrishna direct his mind towards his eye-brows than the Mother's form appeared before his mind's eye but this time he cleaved it, as it were, by the sword of knowledge. The thin veil that separated him from Brahman fell and he passed into the realm of the Unknowable. It was now the turn of Totapuri, who had taken forty years to reach the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, to be surprised at the ease and rapidity with which Sri Ramakrishna had scaled the pinnacle of spiritual realization. For three days, Totapuri kept watch over Sri Ramakrishna. On the fourth day Totapuri, assured that the latter had been established in the discipline, brought him to normal consciousness.

It will be an incomplete survey of the practicality of Sri Ramakrishna as a mystic if we do not mention here how he expanded the vision of those who came in contact with him, even those who came to teach. For, as Swamiji said, Sri Ramakrishna's life itself was a Parliament of Religions. It was therefore natural that those who came to him should have their views extended. We shall cite only the example of Totapuri again. Totapuri, who never stayed for more than three days at any place, charmed with the surroundings of Dakshineswar and enthralled by Sri Ramakrishna spent there nearly eleven months. But he could not understand Sri Ramakrishna's worship of the Divine Mother even after attaining the Nirvikalpa *samadhi*. To him all these forms were only illusions. Sri Ramakrishna, however, chided him for his disparaging remarks about the worship and prayer to God with

form. But deeply imbued with the idea of Advaita Vedanta as he was, Totapuri could not easily give in. Strange, however, are the ways of God. Though he tried to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna several times, something held him back from broaching the subject. At last he fell a victim to dysentery. Griping pain laid him down. He could not sit for meditation. One day in utter disgust he wanted to cast off the body by drowning himself in the Ganga. For what use was it if the mind could not be immersed in the Self. Resolved to do so, one might he walked into the Ganga but wonder of wonders was that though he waded through the river, the water never reached above his knees. In amazement he cried out, 'What strange *mãyã* is this?' Turning back towards the temple of Bhavatarini he saw the benign form of the Divine Mother. He returned to the Panchavati and lay himself down, soothed in body being relieved of pain. Next day Sri Ramakrishna saw him cheerful. Totapuri narrated the incident to Sri Ramakrishna and having been thus enlightened he shed his dogmatic outlook and took leave of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna came to the world to teach mankind that every path was true. Would then the Mother allow his teacher to remain a fanatic? That was not to be. Sri Ramakrishna's contact thus corrected the views of even his teachers.

Another matter Sri Ramakrishna paid great attention to was the company his young disciples kept. In spite of the loving and compassionate heart that he possessed, he could not allow his disciples to mix with any and every sort of man who came even in the guise of a monk. Once a wandering minstrel, a haul came to Dakshineswar and wanted to sit for food along with Narendranath and others who were having a picnic in the Panchavati. The Master did not allow it. He said: 'What merit has he earned that he will sit with you? One should be very careful in associating with people during the early period of one's spiritual life. It harms one's spiritual growth if one indiscriminately mixes with people.'

It is said that religion and religious experiences are other-worldly. First thing here to remember is, that all religions can be followed here and now though we may reap the results of our actions in the other worlds also. Secondly religious experience has an effect on man in this world too. The natural and other forces leave no mark on him. Entering him they are lost like the rivers in the ocean. He alone becomes like a limpid pool, calm, serene and peaceful and not he who is running after the sense objects, says the Gita. Thirdly religion is the basis of morality. By religion no dogma or creed is meant. Religion, as Swamiji often stressed, is realization: realization of God; realization of the unity of all beings. When that realization comes then alone can man talk of universal brotherhood. Today humanity suffers from all types of handicaps, racial, so-called religious, social and others. In such a world the only way to come together is by spiritual realization. In this respect Sri Ramakrishna's contribution is invaluable, immeasurable, overwhelming. By his life he showed that dissensions due to these badges of religion are not necessary. They only bring unrest. Nay, they are harmful. But sad to say, humanity has yet to learn this lesson. Will it ever awake? It can do so if it studies Sri Ramakrishna.

Lastly we shall say a few words as to how practical Sri Ramakrishna was in his normal life. He trained the Holy Mother how to live in the household. He taught her every detail of housekeeping, beginning from the way to trim the lamp upto dealing with persons whom she would have to contact. He chastised his disciples when they took anything for granted. One day he gave a young disciple (Swami Yogananda) some money to purchase a frying pan. The disciple believed the shopkeeper and brought the pan the trader gave without examining it. It was however found that the shopkeeper had deceived the boy and given him a broken pan. At this Sri Ramakrishna commented: 'That you have become a

sadhu is no reason that you should be a fool as well. The trader is not there to earn merit but make money. So before you purchase anything examine it, enquire at other shops and in the case of purchases where an extra allowance is made collect that too.' Such was the advice on things secular by a person who could not take proper care of his wearing apparel! What then to speak of lesser beings! Sri Ramakrishna as we see him portrayed to us in his biographies and talks was intensely practical not only in spiritual but also in secular matters. That is why he has an appeal even to the most modern man. We are sure the erroneous impression that a mystic is a mysterious being will clear away if Sri Ramakrishna's life is properly and critically studied.

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – March 1964; Vol. 50; page 594

It is the greatest tragedy of life that most of the people do not know themselves. This statement may appear as a fallacy. Who does not know himself? Ask anyone and he will reply who he is: son of so and so; a goldsmith, a soldier, an engineer, an administrator, a scholar, a merchant, a diplomat, a blacksmith, or a carpenter; blind or lame, fair or black, wealthy or poor; joyous or sorrowful. What more does he need to know? Is this not enough for his worldly purpose? No doubt a worldly man need know nothing more. But there come in the life of everyone moments when everything seems to go out of gear, symphony of life breaks down, jarring notes impinge on it and the world seems to be what it was not or what it is not to be. Then it is that man wonders whether all that he sees and senses is real. If these moments persist and man takes advantage of his experience to probe deep into the mystery of his own self, he is said to be a wise man. He only can know his true self. 'Having observed the worlds attainable by actions (to be transient) and that this Uncreated One cannot be obtained by karma a Brãhmana should be dispassionate,' says also the *Mundakopanisad*.[1]

Normally, we see that man identifies himself with the body when he says 'I am the son of such and such a person' or that he is black or fair, lame or blind and so on. A vast majority of the populace of the world cannot transcend this body idea. But there are times when man forgets his body also. What does he mean when he says that he is joyous or sorrowful? Is the body feeling that joy? Of course, the body may express it. But where actually is the joy or sorrow? It is in the mind. For the time being, therefore, that person transcends the body. But there is a third experience which cannot be said to be of either the body or the mind—the experience of deep sleep. After awakening from deep sleep the person says 'I slept well. I did not know anything.' Here are two statements — one is sleep and the other is not knowing. The first one shows that the body was restful and the second shows that the mind too was not functioning. But from the statement we come to understand that it is the same person who went to sleep, almost blanked out, that is making the statement and not any other. So we see a third phenomenon: a principle that is active, which is beyond even the mind, and watches even when the mind is at rest. That one say our Rishis is the Ãtman, the true Self and not this body or the mind. These are its outer coverings. And this Ãtman is to be seen, to be heard, to be cogitated and meditated upon, say the Upanisads. So here is evidence enough to show that man is not all what he thinks himself to be — not a mere cage of bones and flesh.

II

Having come to the conclusion that our true Self is not the body or the mind a

natural desire awakens in man to know what it really is; what its nature is; where in the body it resides; how it can be perceived and so on. It is here that we receive immense help from our Rishis and sages, seers and saints, because they have seen the Reality, known it and out of compassion for us handed down their experiences in the form of their talks, and mantras to posterity.

In the *Kathopanisad*, Naciketa asks Yama a very pertinent question, ‘There is this doubt among men: Some say that when this body dies there is something that remains, whereas others say this ceases to be. Taught by you I want to know about this knowledge.’[2] This inquiry is the foundation of knowledge. The generality of mankind is satisfied with the things of the world. For them all these inquiries are superfluous. To most of them religion consists in the fulfilment or observance of some dogmas, some rites and following some creeds. And those who are rich enough and have earned wealth by means fair and foul think that they can purchase their place in heaven by building houses of charity and the like. And they believe that is quite sufficient. But very rarely some see through it all and discard them as meaningless, worthless in a greater sense, in the sense of Reality. That is what Naciketa did. Yama offered him long life, chariots, beautiful damsels, heavenly music, immense wealth and vast land. Yet, though a boy, Naciketa replies wisely, ‘All these, what you offer,’ he says, ‘sap the energy of all the senses and even the longest life is but like a dream, very short-lived. Let, therefore, all these be with you alone.’ [3] That is discrimination, penetration which helps man to uncover himself. Such a strong determination alone brings us nearer to our goal; makes us comprehend the Reality.

This Ãtman is a wonderful thing as the Lord of Death himself testifies. It requires a brilliance of intellect that can illumine the remotest recesses of our heart. Yama in the *Kathopanisad* says, ‘Wonderful is the preceptor of this knowledge and equally marvellous is the pupil who learns it.’[4] For it is so subtle to grasp and we are so much on the gross side of the world. How subtle it is, is described in another place in the same Upanisad thus: ‘It is subtler than the subtlest and greater than the greatest and resides in the cavity of the hearts of beings.’ [5] It is incomprehensible, yet is the essence of our being. It has been spoken of in contradictory terms such as, ‘Though sitting it travels far, though lying down it travels everywhere.’[6] Language fails to describe it, mind fails to grasp it, what it is can be finally said only in negative ways as ‘not this’, ‘not this’: ‘It is not gross nor subtle; it is neither short nor long; neither red colour nor oiliness; neither shadow nor darkness; neither air nor ether, unattached, neither savour nor odour, without eyes or ears, without the vocal organ or mind, non-luminous, without the vital force or mouth, not a measure, without interior or exterior.’ [7] The negative epithets are there to discourage us from imputing any materiality to the Ãtman. By denying odour, taste etc. to it the Upanisad maintains its unapproachability through the limited senses. Man has but only his five senses to evaluate the things presented to him and when he has to deal with phenomena that transcend his senses he feels himself at sea. That is exactly what happens when man tries to know about the Ãtman.

Further, by saying that it is non-luminous the Upanisad does not mean to convey to us that the Ãtman is dull or dark. Luminosity of a material kind is denied to it. The Atman is of the nature of consciousness, how can it be dull! ‘There the sun does not shine, nor the moon nor the stars, nor the lightning, what then to speak of this mortal fire. Everything else shines in its wake. In its light everything becomes luminous,’ say the scriptures. That is what Swami Vivekananda also meant when he said that every soul is potentially divine.

The second conclusion that emerges out of Naciketa's inquiry is that this Ãtman is

deathless and birthless. By denying these two changes to Ãtman, Yama denies to it all the other mutations like growth and decay also. Another Upanisad more explicitly puts it as 'It is free from decrepitude, death and fear, and is immortal.' [8]

This idea is well brought out in the Gita by Sri Krishna. When Arjuna out of infatuation for his kith and kin refused to fight them and put forward arguments to abandon his duty as a warrior, Sri Krishna smiles at his ignorance. He remarks, 'You are grieving for those who are not to be grieved for, yet speak like a wise man. But the wise ones grieve not for the living or the dead.' He continues, 'It is not true that you, I and these people were not there before and will cease to exist with the end of these outer frames. For the embodied being birth and death are only two other types of changes as childhood, growth, youth and old age. He, therefore, grievously errs who thinks that he is killing or is being killed. This Ãtman is unborn, ever existing, eternal, ancient, and is not killed when the body is killed. This Ãtman has not only no death but being immaterial cannot be pierced by the sword, nor burnt by fire, nor drenched by water, nor dried by air. It is all-pervading. It is immovable like a pillar and primordial.' [9] But what it really is can only be subjectively experienced when man transcends all limits, bodily and mental, and attains *nirvikalpasamadhi*.

Sri Ramakrishna many a time attempted to describe what he experienced during his *nirvikalpa samadhi*, — a state where all the accretions of the Ãtman are shed away—but thinking about it he would again cross the barriers of this world of ideation and merge into it. At last he said to the devotees, 'I want to communicate to you what my experiences in that state are but something as it were presses down my tongue.' Another time he said it is like going into the inner apartments and shutting the door; anything that transpires inside remains a sealed book for the outside world.

III

The question that next confronts us is that if the Ãtman were so subtle as cannot be seen how can we believe in its existence at all. To this Sri Ramakrishna says, well, it may not be perceived by the senses but it can be perceived by the pure mind. Sri Krishna also remarks to Arjuna in the Gita, 'You will not be able to see Me with these eyes of yours, I shall bestow on you ethereal eye-sight to see My divine glory.' [10] The pure mind develops a special faculty to perceive the Divine that dwells in every being. Constant dwelling on the Self, on the Divine is the only way to purify the mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If you want to keep your pots and pans bright you have to rub them daily.' This thinking of the Lord is rubbing the mind of all its impurities, making it pure.

Yãjñavalkya exhorts Maitreyi in a similar way when he says that Ãtman is to be heard, to be cogitated and meditated upon. For, 'this Ãtman is a rare thing to hear about in this frenzied world, many have not the opportunity and time to do so. And even among those who hear many do not understand it.' [11] Rare indeed is a person who really hankers after it. Sri Ramakrishna often remarked: 'People shed jugful of tears for wealth, wife and children but where is he who cries for God! Who wants God?' Man is too much absorbed by the world to think of God or Ãtman. But for a person who desires God, wants Him, He comes. The lives of sages and saints are the best assurance about this fact, the greatest testimony.

IV

Though the Ãtman is pervading the bodies of beings it is conspicuously present at the region of the heart. Sri Ramakrishna compared it to a rich man's drawing-room. ‘Though the rich man can be anywhere in the house he is mostly present in his drawing-room. The devotee's heart is God's drawing-room,’ said he. Though God is present in every being He manifests more in man and among men also His manifestation is profoundly felt among the pure-souled devotees. Yogis, therefore, think of a blooming lotus in the region of the heart where they meditate upon the resplendent Ãtman. The Vedas also speak in a like manner. ‘That which is in the lotus-like abode (of the heart) in the city of Brahman is a tiny little space. And that which is in that space is to be investigated, that is to be known.’[12] When this proposition was put forward a natural objection was raised as to what can be there in such a microscopic space. To this the sage answered: ‘All that what you see without, the space, the air, the sun, the moon, and the stars and everything that is and that is not, is inside it,’ meaning thereby that the very same Being which is the Creator, Maintainer and Destroyer of this cosmos resides or is reflected in the heart of a Yogi, just as even the vast sun is reflected in a tiny dew-drop. That this Ãtman is none other than Brahman itself is reiterated in every scripture. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, ‘The Lord, O Arjuna, resides in the region of the heart of all beings. It is He who residing there moves them as if mounted on a machine.’ That is why Yogis and other spiritual teachers tell us to visualize a lotus in the heart as the abode or the seat of the Lord, the Ãtman. For rationally inclined people this may seem a little odd, but to them we refer to Swamiji's instruction. Alluding to the process of Dharana Swamiji remarks, ‘Dharana is holding the mind to certain points. Forcing the mind to feel certain parts of the body. This Dharana is of various sorts, and along with it, it is better to have a little play of imagination. For instance, the mind should be made to think of one point in the heart. That is very difficult, an easier way is to imagine a lotus there. The lotus is full of light, effulgent light.’ Imagination does play a great part in our life. We all know this. So instead of dreaming idle dreams is it not infinitely better to see a lotus in the heart and Ãtman as manifest there? Therefore, this imagination is quite in keeping with even the most rational thinking. Sri Ramakrishna too recommends the heart as a splendid place for concentration.

Further, these words Ãtman and Brahman are often used interchangingly in the Upanisads in order to impress that these two mean one and the same thing. Nay, there is the definite, positive and unambiguous declaration of the Upanisads to this effect: ‘This Ãtman is Brahman who is the experiencer of all.’ [13] Sri Ramakrishna too says, ‘It is God Himself who plays about as human beings.’ From the foregoing evidence both ancient and recent we should have no difficulty to understand the real nature of our true Self, the Ãtman.

All that is required is to remember that we are That. Of course, it is not possible to grasp this idea immediately. Even a person like Swetaketu, brought up in the tradition of the ancient knowledge found it rather hard to understand. His father had to repeat it to him with elaborate explanation not less than nine times before he could comprehend the idea. Further, this knowledge need not necessarily upset the followers of the path of devotion. It is enough for them if they feel an affinity, a kinship to God whom they worship. They may establish any relation with Him — of a child, a servant or a friend whichever agrees with their sentiments. The main purpose of human life being to know one's true Self, to see God, it matters little what path one follows to attain the goal.

[1] Mundakopanisad. 1-2-13.
[2] Katha Upanishad, 1.20.
[3] Ibid., 1.26.
[4] Ibid., 2.7.
[5] Ibid., 2.20.
[6] Ibid., 2.21.
[7] Br. Up., 3.8.8.
[8] Br. Up., 4.4.25.
[9] Gita II. 11 to 13, 19, 20, 24.
[10] Gita, XI.8.
[11] Kathopanishad, 2.7.
[12] Ch. Up. 8.1.1.
[13] Br. Up., 2.5.19.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – April 1964; Vol. 50; page 634

Symbols and ensigns have been in vogue from time out of mind. 'They have not become obsolete with the advance of time or science. Probably today more symbols or signs are used in the world than ever before — nations have their particular flags, military personnel have their ensigns, manufacturers have their trade marks, governments have their seals, political parties have their symbols. The signs and symbols, connected with a nation remind one of its peculiarity, its status in the world, its contribution to the welfare or hardship of the world. The manufacturer's trade mark is an assurance of the genuineness of the products, if they, the products, have proved their usefulness. So also every other emblem brings with it the memory of the thing it represents so vividly as if its whole history had been presented to us in a nutshell.

Another type of sign has, traditionally, come to be recognised as representing a particular sentiment or wish — the white flag in battle indicates surrender; an olive branch is taken as a token of disposition on the part of the bearer for reconciliation; red signals mark danger ahead and green presents a clear way. There are again some distinctive signals which the crew of an aircraft have to understand in its approach to an airport. In short, symbolism is weaved into the fabric of man's life ancient or modern, scientific or unscientific.

Religion also has adopted this method of symbolism and is as old as religion itself. For instance we have in the Rg Veda, which is acknowledged as the oldest written record of spiritual revelations, the *Purusa Sukta* where the Divine is conceived of as a person with millions of heads, myriads of eyes and legs, pervading all the universe and also transcending it.[1] Human beings are on the highest scale of evolution according to any estimate, not excluding that of biological science. Most of the people, therefore, can understand God only as a person. The conception of the ordinary man cannot go beyond it. He can understand Him as a benevolent, beneficent, munificent Person, always ready to help His children. This is an anthropomorphic conception no doubt, but that is nearest to the Truth. But here again the Vedas excel. The very idea is put in a way as to mean more than what meets the eye. It does not mean that an actual form like that of a person was conceived by the Rishis. The real meaning is that the Divine manifests in all beings of this universe and is beyond also. This is made clear in the next two Rks. 'This whole universe that we see is only that Purusa (the Divine). That which is past, and that which is yet to come that also is only Purusa. He is again the Lord of immortality. He manifests in the form of this world for the experience of the *jivas* but on that account this is not His true essence. All this is only His power, Purusa transcends all. This universe and all its beings are only one fourth of Him, the rest immutable portion rests in His own bright self-illumined nature.'[2] Here again the proportion is only figurative, just to show that the

expanse and extent of the Purusa is immeasurable. He is infinite — that is conveyed by these hymns. So though the idea appears in the beginning as anthropomorphic, a little deeper investigation belies this theory.

Again, this symbolic methodology was used both in the Yajñas or sacrifices and Upãsana or meditation as well. In the Aswamedha Yajña, for instance, the body of the sacrificial horse was considered to be the body of the Virat Purusa, the Cosmic Being. Every part of it represented symbolically some aspect of the Cosmic Being — the dawn was represented by the head of the horse, the sun by its eye, the air by its vital force, the fire by its open mouth, and so on. So even while the sacrifice was being conducted the goal aimed at was to impress the constant thought of the Divine. Man lives usually on the mundane plane; very gross are his enjoyments. So the Vedas said that he can have better and more enduring enjoyments if he laid store in the other worlds. He would go to heaven and live happily for a long time there if he did certain sacrifices. They even said that he became immortal, in the sense that the duration of the life there was infinite compared to his mortal span. Among sacrifices the Aswamedha was pronounced to give the highest fruit — attainment of the highest heaven, the Brahmaloka. But it entailed heavy expenditure and collection of rare ingredients which were possible only for kings and emperors. On the other hand there were some obligatory sacrifices to be done by a Brahmana. The life of the Brahmana was a life of abstinence and sacrifice. He had to perform every month two sacrifices known as Darsapurnamãsa, for a long period of thirty years, from the day he 'lights the fire, or in some cases for the rest of his life. Each sacrifice took two days; and on these days he had to abstain from meat and other carnal pleasures. Besides he had to perform the Agnihotra sacrifice, twice daily, once immediately after sunset and again just before sunrise, all through his life. Again there were other sacrifices which a covetor of heaven would have to do. The sacrifices, the performance of which required observance of great austerity and self-control, helped to cleanse the minds of the sacrificers. The purified mind in its turn reflected the truths of religion clearly. So though the sacrificer might have started with the most earthly of motives, he would soon get over them and long to know about the Eternal Truth. This was the purpose of the *karma kanda* of the Vedas — to sublimate man by leading him gradually from gross to the subtle.

II

In respect of Upãsana one proceeds from subtle symbols to subtler ones. Once, Narada approached Sanatkumara, one of the first four recluses and a mind-born son of Brahma, and requested to be taught. Sanatkumara wanted to know what Narada already knew. Narada replied, 'I have studied the Vedas, the puranas, the itihasas' and so on. In brief, every science that was then extant was known to him. But he added 'I know only the mantras (the words, and their word-meanings) but do not know about the Ãtman. I have heard from persons like you that a knower of Ãtman overcomes grief. Respected Sir, I am still under the sway of pain and pleasure. Please ferry me across this ocean of grief.'[3] Knowing the meaning of the texts of the scriptures is not knowledge of Ãtman. It does not make one perfect; does not free one from the pairs of opposites. Narada felt it keenly in spite of all his knowledge of the different Sastras.

'This (that you know) is all name only. Meditate on it as Brahman,'[4] says Sanatkumara. By meditating on it one can reach to whatever is named. 'Is there anything higher than name?' asked Narada. 'Definitely there is. Speech is greater than name.

Through speech only you understand everything. Meditate upon speech,' replied the preceptor. Narada again asked whether there was anything greater than speech. The preceptor by and by instructed that mind was greater than speech; will was greater than mind; *chitta* was greater than the will; meditation was greater than *chitta*; knowledge was greater than meditation, and so on until he came to *Prãna*. Narada who was every time questioning whether there was anything greater than what the teacher was describing, failed to ask whether there was anything greater than *Prãna*. For he thought *Prãna* as represented by Hiranyagarbha was the final reality. Though the disciple did not ask, the preceptor knowing his worthiness, of his own accord instructs Narada not to be satisfied with the knowledge of the *Prãna*, that there was something higher than *Prãna* which was to be known. One does not go beyond disputes (*ativãdi*) by knowing *Prãna*. One should seek the Truth to become a true *ativãdi*.

Narada seeks refuge again with the preceptor and desires to be illumined. 'That which is the vast, that is bliss. There is no happiness in these little things. In the Great one alone is bliss. That vast one is to be known.' [5] And what is that vast one? 'When one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows none other, that is the Great one.' [6] When one goes beyond duality one knows the Great one, Brahman.

In this episode, mentioned in the Upanisad, we see how gradually Narada was asked to seek higher and higher truths. Though Name (the *Sãstras*) was not itself Brahman, he was asked to meditate on that as Brahman, then on speech and so on. These were projected as symbols of Brahman, and such meditation had their own results, far superior to the mundane things. But they were not final. The finale was to be reached only in Brahman. Why did not the preceptor immediately enlighten the disciple? The truth is elusive, almost impossible to understand and there is the danger of misunderstanding when taught to immature minds.

III

A brilliant example, of how difficult of assimilation subtle truths are, is found in Prajapati's instruction to Indra and Virochana in the *Chãndogya Upanisad*. The story runs thus: Once Prajapati, the Lord of the Universe, announced that he who knows the Ãtman, which is untouched by taint, unageing, deathless, free from sorrow, devoid of hunger and thirst, whose desires are true, whose wishes are facts, attains to all the worlds and obtains all his desires. This declaration led the gods and demons, who were naturally hankering after enjoyments, possessions and overlordship of the worlds, to depute their kings Indra and Virochana to learn that knowledge from Prajapati. It was the tradition in those days to go to a teacher with all humility and serve him. The preceptor would, when he thought that they had been sufficiently long with him to understand the knowledge he was going to impart, ask them with what intention they were living with him. Prajapati also followed the rule. He allowed them to serve him and stay with him for thirty two years, on the completion of which period he asked what they wanted to know. They expressed their desire to know about the Ãtman. Prajapati said: 'That Purusa which is seen in the eye that is the Ãtman; It is immortal; It is fearless; It is Brahman.' [7] The purport of Prajapati's instruction was to make them understand that, the Ãtman seen by the Yogis of controlled

senses and annihilated desires, is Brahman. But the disciples, because of their want of penetration, understood Ãtman as the reflection seen in the eye. The symbolical expression was overlooked and the literal meaning was taken.

The disciples — however it should be said to their credit, to make sure that what they understood as the Ãtman was correct — asked whether it was the same Atman which is reflected in the water and in the mirror. Prajapati, not to embarrass them by saying that they were completely wrong, said that it was so and that was 'seen in all these'. Ãtman being the innermost of all beings and nearest to the mind could be seen inside all. But again the disciples missed His point and took it too literally. Prajapati again tried to impress on them that they were mistaken, by asking them to see their reflection in water first as they were — with beard and hair unkempt and dressed in ascetic robes — and again after they had shaven and adorned themselves. Yet by then they were so convinced of their grasp of the subject that they did not take any particular note of the instruction. They took their outer form to be Ãtman and left.

Virochana had no speck of doubt as to the clarity and veracity of his understanding. So he went and proclaimed to his subjects that the body was Ãtman and that It should be well fed and taken care of. Indra on the other hand, when he had gone a little distance, reflected over the two images he had seen. He thought, 'If this body is Ãtman, then it too changes — when the body is well-adorned Atman becomes adorned, when well-clothed It becomes clothed, when cleansed It looks clean, likewise when the body is blinded Ãtman also becomes blind, when the leg becomes lame Ãtman also becomes lame, if so with the death of the body Ãtman also dies. Then where is the result promised by Prajapati?' Thus cogitating Indra returns. Prajapati asks: 'You had gone well-pleased with yourself along with Virochana. What brings you now?' Indra replies, 'Lord, You did not mean, that this reflection was Ãtman when you said that which is seen in the eye is Ãtman.' 'No, certainly not;' replied Prajapati, 'live another thirty two years with Me and I shall teach you.' Indra did so, and Prajapati again spoke to him: 'That which you see enjoying many things in the dream that is Ãtman.' Indra was satisfied and started for his abode. But he mused, 'Though this Ãtman is not affected by the modifications or maimings of the body yet it also is sometimes as if sorrowful, as if weeps. So this also cannot be the Ãtman that the Lord meant.'

A second time he returns and asks to be enlightened. Prajapati asks him to live with him again for another thirty-two years, at the end of which He says, 'that which you see in deep sleep, when even dream is not seen that is Ãtman.' Indra departed delighted at having known, what he considered as the secret about Ãtman. But again doubt assailed him. And he returned and said: 'Lord, in the state you have described now to me, I do not see anything as to say "This am I" neither do I see these creatures. It is almost dark, everything seems, as if, destroyed there. In this I do not see any of your promised fruits.' [8] 'Yes, it is as you say; reside another five years with Me and then I shall teach you,' exhorted Prajapati.

At the end of the period Prajapati said: 'It is true that what you perceived with your eyes and other senses, as also the mind, evaporate into void in deep sleep. You should not be sorry for it. For this body (senses and the mind) are beseized by death. It is subject to destruction, but it is the abode of Ãtman, which is incorporeal, and immortal. As long as the Self is embodied and identifies itself with the body there will be pain and pleasure. It is unavoidable. Pain and pleasure do not touch him alone who transcends the body idea.' [9] A glimpse of which one feels in deep sleep.

We have now seen how the same advice was differently interpreted by different persons, due to the lack of acumen to understand and absence of the required purity of mind to reflect. That is why a graded course and proper symbols are a necessity in the beginning and in most cases for a long time.

IV

Raja Yoga is another method of approach to the Divine. To attain *samãdhi* by control of the life-breath, *prãna* is the way prescribed therein. Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras at one place says, *samãdhi* can be attained also 'by devotion to Ísvara.' [10] Then he gives some idea with regard to Ísvara. But the idea to be remembered is to be condensed or named. So he posits, 'His symbol is Om.' [11] Swami Vivekananda explaining this *sutra* says: 'Every idea that you have in the mind has a counter-part in a word; the word and thought are inseparable. The internal part of one and the same thing is what we call thought. No man can, by analysis, separate thought from word.' Sounds may vary according to languages but the relation between the sounds and thought is a natural one. Swamiji further states, 'Symbol is the manifestor of the thing signified, and if the thing signified has already an existence, and if, by experience, we know that the symbol has expressed that thing many times, then we are sure that there is a real relation between them. Even if the things are not present, there will be thousands who will know them by their symbols.' Millions of aspirants have verified the efficacy of this word 'Om'. In the Upanisads it is said that this Om represents the Universe, past, present, and future and even that which is beyond the three times; beyond the universe.[12]

Patanjali assures us that a repetition of this *mantra* along with meditation on its meaning [13] leads to the desired end, *samãdhi*. How does this repetition of a *mantra* purify the mind? A scientific mind will naturally pose this question. We have to recall here that man is born with a load of *samskãras*, inborn tendencies. What has made these tendencies, rather how are these inclinations created? They are created by us. Whatever we think, speak or do, will and feel disturb the mind-stuff. Swamiji has compared this mind-stuff to a lake. When we throw stones in the water of a lake it is disturbed. Ripples are seen to spread all around. The stones or pebbles go and deposit at the bottom. Likewise the thoughts that we think and actions that we do have an immediate effect of disturbing the tranquillity of the mind, and has a later, more enduring effect as an impression deposited in the recesses of the mind in the form of a tendency — tending to arise again when suitable opportunity presents itself. In Swami Vivekananda's words, they leave a furrow, as it were, in the brain and after a time when the actions are repeated man is compelled to move along this line. Any attempt to deviate from this beaten path is vigorously resisted by the mind. These are called *samskãras*. How then are we to overcome these *samskãras*? Sri Ramakrishna used to say a thorn that has pricked you must be extracted by the aid of another thorn. The evil *samskãras* are to be got rid of by good acts, and good thoughts. By repetition of a *mantra* and meditating on its meaning the mind is secured from sliding back into its old ruts. Fresh *samskãras* are formed by such constant meditation which overwhelm the evil ones, if the practice has been long and intense. The mind being rid of dross inclines naturally towards tranquillity.

The path of Raja Yoga, no doubt, is through psychic control. It prescribes the control of the *prãna*,[14] vital force, — which Swamiji calls the energy in the universe — as

a means to purify the mind-stuff. This is accomplished by the regulation of breath as a first means. The Yoga *sãstra* gives detailed instructions as to how long one has to breathe in, how long to hold it in and how long one should take to expel it. Swami Vivekananda suggests that one should, instead of simply counting numbers to measure time, repeat a holy name, which is the symbol of the Godhead, while doing so, so that one's mind may all the while remain in the thought of the Divine.

Again if this idea appears too abstract for the aspirant, Patanjali suggests alternatives. He says, 'Concentration on an Effulgent Light which is beyond sorrow; or on the heart that has given up all attachments to sense objects; or anything that appeals to one and is good,' [15] is also helpful.

V

With the passage of time when man became more and more extrovert, when he could no longer abide by the duties laid down for him due to various reasons, when ritualistic sacrifices became blind observances and soulless, Hindu teachers developed this idea of symbolic representation of the Godhead so that it could be easily understood even by the common man. Images, and *sãlagrams*, and temples and shrines to house them came into being. Images were not looked upon at any time even by the most ignorant Hindu as mere stone or wood. To him they were the reminders of the Conscious Divine, symbols of Divinity. It is easy to criticize and condemn the image-worship of the Hindu as idolatry, but why does not one, who condemns such worship look to his own creed. Every sect, every religion worships a symbol. But each one thinks that his own symbol is a true one, a correct representation of the Godhead and that all others are in the wrong. This is a perverted view of things and most abject form of self-love. There may have crept some abuses into such worship. But abuses of all sublime thoughts and practices are seen in every sect and every religion. That is no reason to condemn the practice itself.

One has to take the good and leave out the evil. If it has done a little harm at some time owing to the evil hands into which the practice had fallen, it has done infinite good also. Further, as long as man is man, more inclined towards flesh than soul, he requires all the other outer paraphernalia as well to hammer into his consciousness the existence of a Supreme Being which he should not forget. It is fruitless to speak against symbols. They have contributed enormously to the religious culture and spiritual upliftment of man and will continue to do so in future. Masses require them and even the majority of the intellectual classes cannot dispense with them without trepidation as to the consequences. The only thing we should guard against is that such worship does not take a dogmatic shape to enforce one's symbol or image on others.

We shall conclude with Sri Ramakrishna's exhortation regarding image-worship: 'But why clay? It is an image of spirit. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.' What is said of images is also true of symbols.

---

[1] Rig Veda, 10.7.90.1.
[2] Ibid., 10.7.90.2&3.
[3] Chandogya Up. 7.1.3.
[4] Ibid., 7.1.4.
[5] Ibid., 7.23.1.

[6] Ibid., 7.24.1.
[7] Ibid., 8.7.4
[8] Ibid., 8.11.2.
[9] Ibid., 8.12.1.
[10] Yoga Sutras, 1.23.
[11] Ibid., 1.27.
[12] Mandukya Upanishad, 1.
[13] Yoga Sutras, 1.28.
[14] Ibid., 1.34.
[15] Ibid., 1.36 to 39.